

# HIDEOUS CHARACTERS & BEAUTIFUL PAGANS

Performing Jewish Identity on  
the Antebellum American Stage



✧ Heather S. Nathans ✧

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THE ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN STAGE

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Heather S. Nathans

University of Michigan Press  
Ann Arbor

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Acknowledgments are like Tony Award speeches: as soon as they are over the speaker remembers friends and colleagues she has inadvertently omitted. Coming to this point in a book process reminds the scholar how much she owes to the generosity of others, but it is a welcome debt and one I gladly assume.





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## Introduction

### Something in the Jewish Character

*Hideous Characters and Beautiful Pagans* started with an invitation from a colleague to contribute a paper to a panel on Jewish culture in early America—followed by a second invitation, and then a third. By the time I had submitted three papers on the topic of Jewish representation in early American theatre, I had begun to question the received wisdom that Jews were inevitably depicted as venal villains on pre-Civil War American stages or that they were simply the “hideous characters” or “beautiful pagans” described in various theatrical reviews. Certainly stereotypes abounded and many were deeply offensive. But as with all stereotypes, nuances appeared even among the most egregious images, and I saw subtle distinctions that invited me to question *why* a particular stereotype might have been useful in a particular moment or *how* a specific character challenged audience expectations.

Throughout my research, I have returned repeatedly to a phrase invoked by historian George O. Willard, who, in his 1891 history of Rhode Island’s stage, described the state’s Jewish population as “conspicuous in their support” of the earliest theatrical ventures in the young country.<sup>1</sup> “Conspicuous” carries both positive and negative connotations, but above all it signals an ability to attract attention, something Jewish residents did almost inevitably from the settlement of the new nation to the outbreak of the Civil War. Conspicuousness invites scrutiny, whether welcome or unwelcome. Twenty-first-century scholars find the anti-Jewish stereotypes that populated antebellum culture conspicuous primarily in their offensiveness. Yet conspicuousness can also be wielded as a kind of power. Individuals or groups may deploy their differences to serve their own ends.

Thus Willard’s assertion about Jews’ conspicuousness in the formation of the American theatre raises significant questions about roles assigned to Jewish figures onstage and in the national culture versus roles that Jews envisioned for themselves. Although they battled against negative stereo-

types similar to those that plagued their coreligionists in Europe, American Jews carved out new roles for themselves from the very beginning of the first theatrical entertainment in America. Jewish citizens took active and often highly visible parts in American theatrical culture as performers, playwrights, critics, managers, and theatrical shareholders. And perhaps more importantly, they often tied their involvement in these endeavors to the patriotic rhetoric of the young republic.

*Hideous Characters and Beautiful Pagans* explores the ways in which representations of Jewish characters in early national and antebellum American theatres mirrored treatment of Jewish Americans outside the playhouse. It examines both grotesque stereotypes of the popular stage and philo-Semitic heroes of melodrama. These diverse types reflected the struggle of Jewish Americans to establish themselves in the new nation while still adhering to the cultural traditions and religious doctrines of their ancestors. Scholars such as Harley Erdman, Julius Novik, and Henry Bial have already crafted rich explorations of post-Civil War and twentieth-century images of Jews on the American stage, chronicling the rise of Jewish performers in vaudeville, Yiddish theatre, film, and television. I hope that my study, which represents the first book-length treatment of this topic in the pre-Civil War period, will complement their excellent work.<sup>2</sup> I also situate my research among the inspiring investigations of antebellum Jewish history created by Louis Harap, Jonathan Sarna, Jacob Rader Marcus, Frederick Cople Jaher, Lee M. Friedman, William Pencak, Gary Zola, Dianne Ashton, and others.<sup>3</sup> These scholars have probed archival records, recuperating lost voices and mapping complex circum-Atlantic connections among America's early Jewish communities.

I began my own research *not* with an exploration of stage characters, but with a series of runaway advertisements in early American newspapers, specifically ads for indentured Jewish servants who had absconded from their employers.<sup>4</sup> The ads offered a virtual catalogue of Jewish stereotypes that one might also see in the playhouse, including sallow skin and greasy dark hair, German accents, and character traits of lying and swearing. But beyond the racism embedded in the language, these advertisements invited primarily Gentile observers to read an individual's "Jewishness" in face, dialect, and character. They suggested that Gentile Americans anticipated a certain "performance" of Jewish identity from Jews they encountered in everyday life. This in turn raised questions about how these expectations had been cultivated.

Despite the appalling list of characteristics described above, to infer that a history of Jewish representation on the American stage documents a tale of perpetual oppression and humiliation overlooks quotidian exchanges among Jewish and Gentile American audiences that mediated familiar stereotypes throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It ignores ways in which Jewish and Gentile American audiences navigated their path through a minefield of iconic images.<sup>5</sup> Scholar Michael Ragussis uses the term “outlandish” in his study of eighteenth-century stage stereotypes, and the word’s connotation of foreign or alien suggests popular perceptions of “othered” characters shaped by white, predominantly Gentile communities. Yet even as “outlandish” characters emphasize their alienation, ironically they may also have the ability to naturalize unfamiliar figures into a new landscape. Thus they ease the pace of change for audiences consuming these images in the playhouse. So too did Jewish characters on the American stage prompt discourse about Jewish identity in the new nation.

I cannot trace a linear trajectory through the stage images and stereotypes I consider in this study. They defy such easy classification. To attempt to chart a progression from oppression to enlightenment would obscure the complex racial, ethnic, and religious politics that remained in play from the colonial period through the outbreak of the Civil War and beyond. But through a close examination of play texts, theatrical reviews, political discourse, and public performances of Jewish rites and rituals, I argue that Jewish stage types serve as useful indices for interpreting the status of Jewish Americans during critical periods in the nation’s history.

As theatre historians have long noted, however, mapping audience responses to a particular set of images or ideas is a frustrating and perilous task, one that challenges the scholar to conjure the vanished moments of laughter, dismay, or even silence that might have greeted a particular performance. The problem is compounded by the fact that, as Stephen Sondheim observes, “every performance is like a revival.” Each reiteration of a performance on each successive night—even of a brief run, as in the case of George Frederick Cooke’s six-day star turn as Shylock in 1812 Providence, Rhode Island—renegotiates identities being depicted onstage and potentially reconfigures an audience’s understanding of a role or idea. Thus the most vexing, complicated, and exciting part of this study has been my quest to recapture vanished *audiences* of Jewish and Gentile Americans who engaged with Jewish stage characters, performers, and playwrights during the antebellum period. Audiences leave frustratingly scant records, and theatre

historians often have to rely on the accounts of a few critics, diarists, or letter writers for information about responses to a particular play or performer. As I explained to a colleague when questioned about prospective audiences for performances of Jewish identity, I am listening for *echoes* in the culture. For example, a single performance of a Jewish villain may or may not excite commentary and thus offers the historian limited opportunities for speculation. But the command performance of a Masonic song by a Jewish actor/Mason in a community with a substantial number of wealthy Jewish Masons (who also happen to be theatre supporters) may suggest a subterranean network that facilitated Jewish-Gentile interaction on and off stage during that particular time period. Or complaints about productions of *Ivanhoe* and anti-Jewish discrimination may seem isolated incidents until they appear alongside debates about Jewish enfranchisement in a Baltimore newspaper during the furor over the Maryland "Jew Bill" in the 1820s. Throughout my study I use theatrical reviews, diaries, letters, poems, political debates, legislative rulings, cartoons, portraiture, tax records, rumors flying around the tavern, and more to listen for the "echoes" of vanished audiences.

Speaking of Jewish audiences may seem too grandiose a term in an era in which Jews constituted less than 1 percent of the overall population of the United States. But though they were few in number, they were both active and conspicuous, as their own and others' accounts attest. New bride Fanny Yates Levy drew audiences to their feet with her first appearance in a theatre box in Charleston. Mordecai Noah is featured in an 1822 painting of New York's Park Street Theatre. The Mordecai family of Virginia and North Carolina constantly exchanged letters about their theatre-going. Edward Rosewater chronicled his experiences in playhouses from Chattanooga to Nashville. Moses Michael Hays was a patron of the first Boston playhouse. Cincinnati's *The Israelite* regularly published theatrical reviews. "Emperor" Joseph Norton of San Francisco routinely received free tickets to the city's entertainments. These are just a few examples of the numerous accounts of Jewish audiences I investigate. While Jewish Americans may have comprised a comparatively small constituency in the audience, they still left a record of their presence and their participation. And while I cannot speculate that all Jewish audience members shared the same response to particular characters or events onstage, any more than I could claim that all Gentile audience members reacted in the same way, the conspicuousness of Jewish audience members often prompted those around them to conjecture how they *might* respond. They served, in some sense, as a litmus test for non-

Jewish audience members about the authenticity or offensiveness of what they were seeing on the stage. *Hideous Characters and Beautiful Pagans* integrates social, political, and cultural histories, with an examination of those texts (both dramatic and literary) that shaped the stage Jew. I hope the study will contribute to a larger discussion about how antebellum America used its performance culture to wrestle with issues of racial, ethnic, and religious tolerance and identity.

Theatre scholar Joseph Roach has argued that certain performances or roles “hold open a place in memory into which many different people may step according to circumstances or occasions.”<sup>6</sup> Certainly stage Jewish characters fulfilled this function for American audiences both inside and outside the playhouse. For example, successive waves of “performers” stepped into the role of Shylock in America, whether it was Irish actor Patrick Malone, originating the role on a Virginia stage in 1752; or Gentile merchants who failed to comply with wartime nonimportation agreements during the American Revolution and were labeled “Shylocks”; or an 1872 cartoon image of Shylock reminding presidential candidate Ulysses S. Grant of his infamous “Order no. 11” in 1862 that expelled Jews from Tennessee, Mississippi, and Kentucky during the Civil War. Well-known and oft-performed characters such as Shylock and Jessica from *The Merchant of Venice*, Isaac the Jew and Rebecca from *Ivanhoe*, Sheva from *The Jew*; or, *the Benevolent Hebrew*, or Leah from *Leah the Forsaken* invited Jewish and Gentile audiences to reassess meanings of “Jewishness” in particular historical moments as they witnessed new interpretations layered upon old. Marvin Carlson has described such performances as “haunted” because they are constantly reinvented *and* quoted for audiences.<sup>7</sup> Thus a New York theatre critic witnessing Thomas Abethorpe Cooper’s sympathetic interpretation of Shylock in 1799 might contend that “the passions and behavior of Shylock have been mistakenly looked upon by vulgar spectators as appropriate to a peculiar people, but it is in fact a picture of nature. Shylock is not a Jew, but a man; an oppressed, injured, insulted, despised man.”<sup>8</sup> In this comment, the critic reveals both the actor’s new interpretation of the part *and* the stage history that the character invokes in his very name. Even new Jewish characters written for American audiences, such as Susanna Rowson’s treacherous Ben Hassan in *Slaves in Algiers* (1794) were ghosted by trailing histories of Jewish villains. As Carlson observes, “We are able to ‘read’ new works—whether they be plays, paintings, musical compositions, or, for that matter, new signifying structures that make no claim to artistic expression at all—only



because we recognize within them elements that have been recycled from other structures of experience that we have experienced earlier.”<sup>9</sup> Throughout my research, I became fascinated by the ghosts that haunted American Jews’ performances of their own religious and cultural identity in everyday life and how shades of well-known figures from theatre, literature, and poetry engaged with these performances. Carlson’s ghosting theory informs my discussions of those roles that appeared over and over again in antebellum culture.

Actors and audience members (both Gentile and Jewish) continually stepped into a “place in memory,” renegotiating past, present, and future relationships via each performance. Some scholars have argued that performances of Jewish characters onstage simply reified stereotypes. Yet the works, events, and biographies I explore in this study represent not reification, but constant renegotiation between playwrights, publics, and performers over issues of Jewish identity. After all, if it were a fixed concept that Jews represent “X,” there would scarcely be any point in arguing about certain texts or performances or in placing them alongside “real life” examples. Historian Jonathan Sarna offers a useful description of the gap between the “mythical Jew” that haunted American culture and the “Jew next door.”<sup>10</sup> He suggests that Jewish and Gentile communities developed strategies for coping with dissonance between the two. He defines four approaches that he labels “*suppression*, *rationalization*, *elimination*, or *reconceptualization*.” For Sarna, *suppression* meant simply ignoring any dissonance between myth and reality; thus an early American newspaper might claim that Shylock revealed the “hideous character” of the Jew *and* that the Jews had been a “much maligned people.”<sup>11</sup> *Rationalization* focused on examples of Jewish exceptionalism. Gentile observers might attribute a certain trait to “Jews” generally but acknowledge that a particular Jew defied the general rule. Popular dramas *The Jew; or, the Benevolent Hebrew* (1794) and *The Jew and Doctor* (1799) rely on this tactic to suggest that while “Jews” in general are venal, some exceptional Jews may demonstrate more charitable behavior. The tactic of *elimination* might entail a range of actions from conversion to eradication. Certainly many of the dramas on antebellum stages offer examples of Jews pressured to convert to Christianity, such as Fetnah in *Slaves in Algiers* or Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*, while offstage, organizations such as the Society for Ameliorating the Condition of the Jews (founded in 1820) envisioned not only converting America’s Jews but relocating them to western territories. For Sarna, *reconceptualization* of the “mythical Jew” represented the most

radical and therefore most infrequent strategy: it “involved reinterpreting Jewish history so as to make the ancient Jew appear more respectable.”<sup>12</sup> A spate of nineteenth-century dramas turned to Bible stories of Esther and Moses to conjure examples of Jewish heroes and heroines and to suggest that those figures had passed on their virtues to contemporary Jews. Jewish religious rituals also appear with surprising frequency throughout antebellum drama, and how they were used by both Jewish and Gentile authors often reflects contemporary thinking about Jewish citizenship in the new nation.<sup>13</sup> For example, the manner in which some plays depicted Purim festivals and Haman’s persecution of the Jews might be seen as commentary on various post-Revolutionary edicts that denied Jews full rights of American citizenship. Dramas featuring biblical characters or religious rituals offered audiences opportunities to reconfigure their understanding of “Jewishness” by seeing it embodied in heroic and ceremonial forms.

In examining representations of Jewish identity onstage, I am indebted to Henry Bial’s fascinating exploration of the ways in which Jewish American audiences understood certain characters or situations as “double-coded.” In *Acting Jewish* Bial notes, “When considering the performance of Jewishness in mass culture, then, it is necessary to address the way the work speaks to at least two audiences: a Jewish audience and a general or gentile audience. This is what I mean by the term double-coding. . . . While theoretically there are as many variant readings of the performance as there are spectators, in practice, readings tend to coalesce around certain culturally informed subject positions: a ‘Jewish’ reading and a non-Jewish or ‘gentile’ reading.”<sup>14</sup> As I struggled to imagine what—if any—agency Jewish Americans might have asserted in pre-Civil War American culture (particularly when faced with so many overwhelming stereotypes), I turned to Bial’s concept of double-coding for greater insights into how audiences might read such complex texts. Bial also describes ways in which audiences and performers engaged in a “mutual act” of memory making, and it is the *mutual* aspect of that process that allowed me to interpret strategic choices and even strategic omissions in plays and performances I examined.<sup>15</sup> For example, if a Jewish playwright such as Jonas B. Phillips adapted a popular novel with a stereotypical Jewish villain as a play, and if Phillips chopped the part down to a mere five lines, could that be interpreted as a deliberate intervention in a mutual act of memory making taking place between Phillips and an audience already familiar with the novel’s more negative stereotype? Or if Mordecai Noah wrote a play about American captives in Algiers based on his own experi-

ence as consul of Tunis, and if he named one of his characters Hassan Ben, could it be a double-coded “wink” to audiences familiar with the dastardly Jewish character of Ben Hassan in Rowson’s earlier drama?

In exploring challenges facing authors like Phillips and Noah, *Hideous Characters and Beautiful Pagans* questions how Jewish playwrights situated themselves in antebellum American culture and the extent to which they chose to integrate their religious or cultural traditions into their dramatic texts. Some Jewish American authors such as George Washington Harby created plays that largely ignored questions of religious or ethnic background, while others set their plays during the Spanish Inquisition when Jews were persecuted for their beliefs and forced to celebrate their religious rites in secret. Playwrights Mordecai Noah or Samuel B. H. Judah embedded “double-coded” characters in their works, inviting audiences to link outsider figures of Native Americans or foreign soldiers to the Jewish diasporic experience.

My study also explores the extent to which Jewish actors manipulated their own images on the national stage, querying why theatre critics and historians continued to single out Jewish performers based on perceived racial markers (and whether this was the actor’s intention in some cases). For example, nineteenth-century theatre historian Charles Durang referred to actor-manager William Dinneford as a “dashing Israelite.” Was Durang marking Dinneford based on his own racial or ethnic prejudices, or had Dinneford somehow claimed his Jewish heritage as part of his stage persona? Another Jewish actor-manager, Moses Phillips, earned the sobriquet of “Nosey” for his large nose. He also frequently engaged in devious business practices, and fellow theatre managers sometimes compared him to Shylock. Yet Moses apparently gloried in his exploits and willingly embraced the role of trickster in the public imagination. In these cases and in others, each performer’s Jewish identity—whether religious or ethnic—became a critical part of his or her persona.

#### “HERE I AM IN A NEW LAND”

Jews were simultaneously conspicuous and inconspicuous in pre-Civil War American culture. They never appeared as numerous as the other religious or ethnic populations that swarmed American shores (Irish Catholics, Scots Presbyterians, English Quakers, and French Huguenots). Nor were they as

visible as the country's ever-expanding communities of African Americans forcibly brought to the United States during the Middle Passage. Yet somehow, they stood out, not merely for customs and practices that distinguished them from Gentiles, but because the term "Jew" came loaded with such complex psychological, intellectual, and spiritual baggage. No matter where they came from—England, France, Holland, Spain, Portugal, Italy, the German territories, or Algiers—Jews landing in America found themselves at the heart of a paradox. They had arrived in a nation ostensibly built on the concept of reinvention, as law student Joseph Lyons noted when he arrived for his studies in Savannah, Georgia, in 1833: "I never before knew what it is to be a stranger. . . . Here I am in a new land & have the opportunity of being what I will."<sup>16</sup> Still, many Jews found themselves dogged by transplanted European images of "Jewishness" that proliferated on the stage, in newspapers, and in popular literature.

The terms "Jewishness," "Jew," and "Jewish" appear on every page of this study, yet I have found little consensus among my sources whether "Jewish" connoted a race, a religion, an ethnic identity, or even a collection of character traits. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Americans used the terms to mean multiple things, sometimes all at the same time.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the book I have tried to indicate points where definitions shift most visibly, particularly when considering the Jewish heritage of some of the figures I discuss, but it has not always been possible to pin down specific meanings for the terms. For me, this fluidity illuminates the confusion many Jews and Gentiles experienced in trying to fathom what "Jewish" and *performing Jewishness* meant in the context of the new nation.

Jewish American history really begins in the seventeenth century with the Jewish settlement of various colonial outposts throughout the Atlantic circuit. As Sephardic Jews sought to escape ongoing persecution from Catholic courts, particularly those of Spain and Portugal, they sought refuge—or at least relative invisibility—in the New World. Many had been forced to convert in Europe in order to escape torture or death. Known as *conversos* or crypto-Jews, these men and women embraced the comparative freedoms they found in the colonies. As Laura Leibman says, "Jews stood at the crossroads of colonial American history: they were the place where the past, present, and future met."<sup>18</sup>

Richard Kagan, Phillip Morgan, Jonathan Sarna, and others have described ways in which early settlements in Jamaica, Bermuda, Surinam, and New Amsterdam (New York) embedded Jews in rapidly expanding trade

networks. Often called “Port” Jews, these traders facilitated shipping and market exchanges throughout the Dutch, English, Jamaican, and American markets.<sup>19</sup> As Sarna notes, they “extended the boundaries of the Jewish world and reimagined its contours,” and each one of the colonial North American centers of Jewish life—Savannah, Charleston, Philadelphia, New York, and Newport—developed in a port city.<sup>20</sup>

But although Jewish settlers played an integral role in Atlantic trade networks and although many amassed impressive wealth (for example, Aaron Lopez of Newport was reputed to be the richest man in the colonies before the Revolution), Jews remained a miniscule portion of the colonial population. During the early years of Jewish settlement, comparatively few communities boasted sufficient numbers to assemble a minyan (the requisite ten adult Jewish men required to hold services). Inhabitants of Curacao and New York established congregations in their cities in 1651 and 1655 respectively, although it would be decades before synagogues would appear in New York, Newport, or Charleston, and even longer before they could be supported in cities such as Richmond or Baltimore. Still, Jewish colonial inhabitants took care to sustain as many ritual practices as possible, including keeping kosher, building ritual baths, undergoing circumcision, and establishing separate Jewish cemeteries.

Many Jewish immigrants found a greater degree of tolerance in the British colonies than they had experienced in Europe. Indeed, in the early part of the eighteenth century, Britain eased colonial naturalization laws for Jewish citizens. This shift did not stem from a move toward greater religious freedom in Britain; it recognized a need to populate colonial cities. Despite concessions from the British colonial regime that enabled Jews to build their own synagogues or find a pathway to citizenship, anti-Semitic prejudice persisted, whether as a casual or active animus, in numerous facets of American life. Those included legal disabilities prohibiting Jews from holding public office to local laws penalizing Jews for conducting business on the Christian Sabbath. Jewish Americans often found themselves at a disadvantage in negotiating even the most basic daily activities. Even as the country's Jewish population grew, reaching roughly 3,000 by the Revolution (and approximately 200,000 by the Civil War), Jews remained a minute portion of the US community, representing less than .0065 percent of the total population in 1860. They often faced obstacles in advocating for Jewish rights, in part because of the comparatively few Jews residing in the United States and in part because longstanding biases continued to cloud issues relating to the

status of Jews. During the Revolution, Jewish Americans actually *lost* rights in many areas, as individual state governments implemented acts restricting access to citizenship. In some cases, Jews' full legal rights would not be fully restored until well after the Civil War.

The Constitution of the United States, ratified in 1787, guaranteed freedom of religion, but free public expression of faith remained a contentious issue in the years between the Revolution and the Civil War. Some Gentile communities voiced support for those professing the Jewish faith, offering particular admiration for what they perceived as a very learned sect. And Jews and Gentiles occasionally united during moments of crisis—as in the Richmond Theatre fire of 1811 that killed more than sixty citizens, including the governor of Virginia. Yet Jewish Americans expressed dismay at what seemed an ever-present impulse to lead them toward conversion to Christianity, whether through formal organizations such as the Society for Ameliorating the Condition of the Jews in the 1820s, or through more insidious means, such as novels, children's stories, and plays in which heroes found happiness by renouncing Judaism and embracing Christianity. Ongoing attacks on Jews abroad, such as the Damascus Affair (1840) and the Mortara case (1858), would prompt Jewish communities in America to develop more unified responses to crises that threatened their religious freedom. As the hero of Herman Moos's 1860 drama *Mortara, or the Pope's Inquisitor* ultimately recognizes, when one Jewish citizen suffers for his or her beliefs, all Jews may be in danger. The comparative safety so many Jews found on American shores could not guarantee a permanent respite from persecution.

Religious rumblings stirred *within* the nation's Jewish population as well throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century up to the Civil War. Long-established Sephardic communities clashed with more recently arrived Ashkenazic groups about whose ritual practices should prevail, and the reform movement of the 1820s also shook more traditional congregations. Playwright, critic, and educator Isaac Harby would champion religious reform in 1820s Charleston, and Isaac Leeser of Philadelphia and Isaac Mayer Wise of Cincinnati would face off over the issue in their respective writings and newspapers by the 1850s.

As Jewish Americans cultivated their place in the new nation, they expanded their outreach via social and charitable organizations. Sometimes these groups included Gentiles, but more frequently they focused on supporting fellow members of the Jewish community through schools, orphan asylums, and relief for the poor. These venues also allowed Jewish women

to establish a more prominent place for themselves in American culture. And as Jewish communities grew in cities such as Charleston, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and eventually Galveston, Houston, and San Francisco, Jewish citizens began to take a more active role in cultural activities as well. They might always have been “conspicuous” as patrons of the arts, beginning with the colonial theatre, but they now began to form their own amateur theatrical companies and host musical societies as well. Thus they claimed a greater share in the daily practice of supporting and sustaining the arts in America.

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

*Hideous Characters and Beautiful Pagans* spans six chapters, each of which maps a different phenomenon in portrayals of Jews in American theatre. Thus the work does not, and indeed *cannot*, chart a progressive narrative arc. While individual chapters in this study follow an internal chronology from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War, they do not trace the *same* histories and events in each chapter. A discussion of women’s roles in Jewish American culture necessarily engages with different historical moments than a conversation about Jewish men’s campaign to roll back wartime voting prohibitions. Readers will find overlap and intersection among the chapters, but each follows a thematic trajectory first and foremost. While some transformations of Jewish characters on the American stage paralleled the development of American national consciousness, no one play, playwright, or movement ever entirely exorcised another.

For example, even while sympathetic Jewish fathers gained currency on the stage, the villainous Shylock continued to offer audiences an example of Jewish perfidy. Indeed, it is the coexistence of these paradoxes that fuels my investigation. Were American audiences being asked to choose which image represented the “real” Jew versus the “mythical” Jew, or were they being invited to imagine that Jewish characters might be as individual as Gentile ones and to acknowledge that some were good and some were evil, depending on situation and background? Or were the differences regional, as some reviews suggest? How did some theatre managers become sensitized to the feelings of their Jewish audience members to the point that they hesitated to offend them by presenting negative Jewish characters onstage? Positive and negative characters circled in orbit, each exerting a strong gravitational



pull on the other, and each inevitably shaping the other as well. Chapter 1, "Crisis and Change: Transforming Jewish Masculinity from the Revolution to the Jew Bill of 1826" focuses on the legal status of Jewish American men from the colonial period through passage of the Maryland "Jew Bill." I connect pre- and postwar struggles of Jewish citizens to establish their rights with comic representations of Jews on colonial and early American stages, linking stereotypes of Jewish avarice to political debates over British taxes with the 1767–1768 Sugar, Stamp, and Townsend Acts (when noncompliant merchants were frequently labeled "Shylocks") and when issues of Jewish naturalization were complicated by wartime edicts. From the 1752 American debut of *The Merchant of Venice* onwards, vexing stereotypes of avaricious and aggressive Jews seemed curiously at odds with the colonists' almost "casual" anti-Semitism.<sup>21</sup> Such types strike a peculiar note in light of colonial laws designed to facilitate Jewish immigration to the colonies in order to expand and stabilize colonial settlements. Though the Jewish population in the colonies was small, it had been established for more than a century by the time the first Jewish characters appeared in colonial playhouses. Representations of Jews that proliferated in the British theatre collided with nascent Jewish identities emerging in mid-eighteenth-century American culture, as stereotypes circulated through the Atlantic system, transforming en route to the New World. In this chapter, I ask whether the ingrained habit of stereotyping Jews in the theatre offered an echo of British culture just like the fine scenery and new fashions imported with the players, or if it had been vernacularized into something more distinctly American by the early nineteenth century?

Chapter 2, "Blood and Sacrifice: Jewish Citizenship, Masculinity, and Violence, 1826–1861," maps ways in which Jewish men renegotiated roles onstage and off as fathers, husbands, and citizens. When the law failed, violence prevailed, and chapter 2 examines a series of father-daughter conflicts as one key to interpreting representations of Jewish men in the later antebellum period. The chapter also turns to a series of highly theatricalized duels and trials that put Jewish masculinity on display, such as the public beating of Mordecai Noah, immortalized in a cartoon showing him in front of the Park Street Theatre with the plays *The Jew* and *The Hypocrite* "advertised" on the placard behind him. I look at the infamous Minis-Stark duel of 1832 (in which Phillip Minis shot a man who called him a "damned Jew") and the 1858 trial of Jewish American playwright George Washington Harby, accused of shooting his daughter's seducer. Each of these highly



public performances of Jewish masculinity invited audiences to speculate on roles for Jewish men in American culture. The chapter also explores how Jewish American playwrights such as Mordecai Noah or Jonas B. Phillips constructed parental roles, combining traditional Jewish patriarchal figures with idealized republican fathers who honored traditions while respecting their children's freedom.

Chapter 3, "Strangers in a Strange Land: From the Wandering Jew to the Cosmopolitan Citizen," examines how the tradition of emigration, whether forced or voluntary, informed the development of antebellum Jewish American identities, and it traces ways in which the "wandering Jew" of literature and legend found a home in American theatrical culture. The figure of the itinerant Jew, unmoored from confines of national belonging, appears as a familiar one in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European literature. The "traditional" story of the Wandering Jew (a character grown out of medieval legend) relates the history of a man who supposedly mocked Christ on his way to the crucifixion and was thus condemned to wander the earth until Christ's return.

As Regine Rosenthal notes, the Wandering Jew is "punished without pardon. No conversion to Christianity and no repentance can absolve him from his guilt, for his sin basically consists in being a Jew."<sup>22</sup> Whether villain, clown, or figure of pathos, he roams among the various communities that he encounters, always ineluctably foreign. Unlike Christian characters that may journey on a temporary voyage of self-discovery (Robinson Crusoe, for example), the status of permanent traveler distinguishes the fictional Jewish character from his Gentile counterpart. The Christian, no matter the difficulty of his circumstances, or however far he treks from his native heath, may still imagine a home in the way he frames his performance of self. The Jew finds that right tacitly or explicitly denied.<sup>23</sup>

In looking at the ways in which some Jewish artists found themselves alternately embraced and excluded, chapter 3 traces the extension of Jewish networks across antebellum landscapes, querying how those emerging communities enabled the development of diverse Jewish American cultures. In addition to popular plays that featured the Wandering Jew, chapter 3 examines histories of itinerant performers such as the Solomon family, reputed to be one of the first, if not *the* first, Jewish acting families in the post-Revolutionary theatre. The Solomons fought to make a space for themselves in postwar playhouses, lacking sufficient community ties to establish a permanent home in any one city. I juxtapose the Solomons with juvenile star

John Howard Payne, whose wistful melody “Home, Sweet Home” suggested to some Payne’s own longing to end his extended wanderings through the United States and Europe. As Jews put down roots in new communities, almost every major urban theatre boasted at least a handful of Jewish patrons (such as the Mordecais of Richmond, Virginia). What encouraged these patrons (who often constructed plainly built synagogues in the early days to avoid unwanted attention) to invest in monuments to luxury and leisure like playhouses? Did their patronage signal a measure of acceptance already established in the Gentile community, or did it represent a hope that they might one day achieve that acceptance? Chapter 3 also examines moments of devastating reversal, when familiar figures with established reputations, such as playwright Mordecai Noah or the Mordecai family, suddenly found themselves targeted by virtue of their Jewish identity or heritage.

Chapter 4, “For They Abide with Us,” explores the expansion of Jewish actors, playwrights, and performers across the American frontier, inching toward a tipping point at which Mary Ann Keeley, an actress of Jewish descent touring the United States, could declare that “The Hebrew people have given some brilliant names to music and the drama, right royal names, I think. And the list seems never-ending.”<sup>24</sup> This never-ending list included actor-managers such as William Dinneford, the Nathans circus family, and the talented Wallack family, alongside many others. The list also began to encompass troupes of talented amateurs as growing Jewish communities in cities such as Cincinnati, New Orleans, San Francisco, and elsewhere turned their attention to creating dramatic societies designed to foster a love of drama within Jewish American culture. As Jewish communities expanded across the country, their activities became more conspicuously invested in demonstrating their right to full participation in American culture. Chapter 4 concludes with an excursus into the history of “Emperor” Joseph Norton, an eccentric Jewish madman from California, and the self-styled Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico. In the years before the Civil War, Norton became a well-known and beloved figure in San Francisco. A dedicated theatregoer, he commanded sufficient goodwill among area theatre managers that they generally provided him with free tickets, and he occasionally shared his critiques of the drama with his faithful “subjects.” Indeed, Norton became so popular that, beginning in 1861, his story inspired several theatrical productions, including *Norton the First, or Emperor for a Day* and *The Naked Truth; or, The Emperor’s Dream*.<sup>25</sup>

Chapter 5, “Beautiful Pagans: Dramatic and Domestic Encounters,”

looks at the stage Jewess, the compelling figure that preceded the tragic mulatto as American drama's taboo female icon.<sup>26</sup> Previous studies such as Kimberly Manganelli's *Transatlantic Spectacles of Race: The Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse* have offered in-depth explorations of the stage Jewess as an exotic character on the American stage.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, I focus on the Jewess's development as an icon of republican womanhood and what Di-anne Ashton has labeled "domestic feminism." Stage Jewesses of the colonial period present parables of both seduction and sentiment. Revolutionary-era rhetoric often centered on the contrast between these two themes, with seduction framed as evidence of moral weakness and sentimental attachment proffered as proof of spiritual strength. By the early nineteenth century, the stage Jewess emerged as more independent than her docile, domesticated sister of a century before. Popular fictional characters created by American and British authors such as Charles Brockden Brown, Sir Walter Scott, Maria Edgeworth, and others helped to popularize images of Jewish women as learned, faithful, and righteous, images that intersected with concepts of republican motherhood during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Antebellum Jewish women drew on both Jewish and Gentile practices in establishing their roles in American society. Through teaching and philanthropy they used traditional routes open to women to exert an influence not only on their communities but on the national imagination as well. Rebecca Gratz of Philadelphia offers the quintessential example of an American Jewish woman who played a prominent role in Jewish and Gentile society and who had a profound influence as a role model for fictional characters in literature and theatre.<sup>28</sup> Yet Gratz was just one of many early American Jewish women who made a substantial impact on Gentile perceptions of Jewish identity. For example, Rachel Mordecai of North Carolina rebuked novelist Maria Edgeworth for her "illiberal" treatment of the Jews in her work, and Edgeworth responded by writing the novel *Harrington* in which she presented a more sympathetic representation of Jewish womanhood.<sup>29</sup>

As Jewish women assumed more active roles in American culture, the stage witnessed a corresponding rise in the number of plays about strong Jewish female characters. Esther became a particularly popular figure, as did Moses's mother and sister. These characters offered Gentile audiences opportunities to see Jewish women defending their faith while also demonstrating patriotism (and, by implication, republican virtue).

Chapter 6, "'If I forget thee': Performing Jewish Rituals on the Antebellum Stage," investigates translations of Jewish traditions and culture into

the playhouse, including Passover, Purim, and the Sabbath. It contrasts commemorations of those traditions onstage with rapid urbanization in antebellum American Jewish culture. As communities of Jewish Americans struggled to sustain their heritage, how did the American stage envision these “ancient” rituals for new audiences? Some dramas contained lengthy footnotes, documenting their authors’ careful adherence to biblical sources, while others took blatant liberties with Jewish rituals, adding exotic costumes, songs, music, etc. Still others seemed intent on teaching the audience about the history of Judaism, like those plays that included elaborate tableaux or descriptions of scenery depicting the flight from Egypt as a backdrop to scenes of Passover celebrations. These dramas played out against a series of encounters between Jews and Gentiles outside the playhouse through which Gentiles acquired greater familiarity with Jewish rituals such as *seders* or Jewish weddings. Many Christian observers expressed their fascination with the rituals they observed, recording them in diaries or letters to friends. For example, one diarist traveling in 1793 attended a service at a Georgia synagogue (which she described as a “singular mode of worship”) before going to a Jewish community member’s house for “Passover cakes.”<sup>30</sup> And yet despite such demonstrations of honest curiosity, Jews found themselves dogged by familiar rumors, like the infamous “blood libel,” which accused Jews of kidnapping and killing Christian children to use their blood in Jewish religious rituals.

In addition to examining Gentiles’ perceptions of Judaism as represented both on- and offstage, I also look at those fleeting moments when Jewish Americans acknowledged schisms in their own communities, including rifts between groups of Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewish settlers. Playwrights Isaac Harby, Samuel B. H. Judah, and Herman M. Moos each engaged with struggles over Jewish religious reform, advocating change to sustain the faith under the pressure of increasing immigration.

*Hideous Characters and Beautiful Pagans* concludes with a brief coda, “Idealists and Dreamers.” In 1862, General Ulysses S. Grant issued a drastic order expelling southern Jews from the territories under his wartime command. Perhaps more than any other incident I discuss in this study, Grant’s action exemplifies that stories of Jewish representation in American culture offer no clear progression from negative to positive, from outsider to citizen. Revolutionary characters shared a repertoire with regressive ones and debates over Jewish identity on the national stage would only grow more contentious in the years to come as more Jewish immigrants flooded into the

United States, seeking refuge from intolerable conditions elsewhere. Anti-Semitic bias would resurface in response to these new Americans. Stage characters, while growing more diverse in some ways, still echoed prejudices of more than a century before. And yet by 1910 the *American Hebrew* would suggest to its readers, "The remarkable activity of Jews in the theatrical profession as managers, authors, and players, leads to the query whether there is not something in the Jewish character that leads it to take up with this volatile, and in a measure, unconventional profession."<sup>31</sup> As this author's comments suggest, debates over the volatile, unconventional, and *conspicuous* nature of the Jewish character would remain compelling questions into the twentieth century. By recuperating the histories and works of those whose contributions have become *less* conspicuous to present-day scholars, I hope to illuminate ways in which problematic and often uncomfortable representations of Jewishness on American stages reflected a series of urgent and ongoing dialogues about the place of Jews in the new nation.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Crisis and Change*

#### Transforming Jewish Masculinity from the Revolution to the Jew Bill of 1826

An American audience . . . unfettered by prejudice [received] the piece with distinguished applause.

—THEATRICAL REVIEW OF *THE JEW, OR THE BENEVOLENT HEBREW* IN *THE AURORA*, FEBRUARY 16, 1795

The Government of the United States . . . gives to bigotry no sanction.

—PRESIDENT GEORGE WASHINGTON TO THE NEWPORT SYNAGOGUE, 1790

Who shall boast that the age of fanaticism has passed?

—*THE MARYLAND CENSOR* ON THE 1819 DEBATE OVER THE “JEW BILL”

From before the American Revolution to the outbreak of the Civil War, citizenship—its rights and responsibilities—remained at the core of debates about American identity. Minority groups in American society labored to establish a presence in politics and in the nation’s culture. They combated persistent stereotypes and caricatures often invoked to police boundaries of what some hoped to define as a white, Christian nation. Jewish American men were no exception to this phenomenon. The American stage and American print culture were littered with inherited European characters that presented submissive, foolish, and even villainous images of Jewish men.<sup>1</sup> Beginning in the late eighteenth century, these figures faced competition from a new wave of philo-Jewish characters arguing for religious tolerance and inclusion. This collection of the wicked, the good, and the weak circled in an uneasy dance on the national stage. Rather than simply serving as diverting spectacles, their representations mirrored contests for Jewish men’s participation in the American polity.

This chapter uses play texts, theatrical reviews, political discourse, and public performances of masculine prerogative to explore the often contradictory representations of Jewish male identity on early American stages and to suggest why certain types emerged (or resurfaced) at strategic points in the nation's debates on citizenship and masculinity.<sup>2</sup> Jewish male stage types served as useful indices for interpreting the status of Jewish men in early American culture.

This chapter also considers the roles and performances of Jewish men in relationship with the law. Naturalization laws, allegiance oaths, wartime edicts, voting laws, and property laws all shaped how Jewish American men imagined their places in the new nation. Similarly, the dramatic characters I discuss in this chapter encountered legal barriers that challenged their full participation in their communities; from Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* to Isaac the Jew in stage adaptations of *Ivanhoe*, American audiences regularly encountered Jewish characters whose needs or desires were affected by their relationship with the law. And some audiences saw parallels between stage characters and ways Jews were treated beyond the playhouse.

The chapter begins with types that populated American stages *before* the Revolution, interrogating how familiar European stage Jews were translated into a colonial American idiom. It then examines the postwar attempts to establish uniquely "American" characters in both the political realm and the playhouse. Embedded in these efforts were ongoing ideological and legal debates about citizenship and about relationships between citizenship and masculinity. I connect these representations to pressing national debates over Jews' legal rights as well as more local spectacles involving public disputes between pro- and anti-Jewish parties.

During the American Revolution, Jewish men who had served in the army or in various wartime networks found themselves initially stripped of their rights by wartime resolutions, then rapidly elevated to the status of full citizens through the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. But the national edicts erased neither long-standing prejudices nor growing anxieties about what Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Joanne Melish have termed "the stability of whiteness" in post-Revolutionary culture, or what Harley Erdman has described as a perceived "threat to white gentile manhood."<sup>3</sup> As party schisms widened throughout the early national period, political opponents leveled racial attacks against their competitors, sometimes conflating anti-Jewish and antiblack rhetoric as a means of "othering" both nonwhite and non-Christian communities.

Onstage, images of the Jewish man as the perpetual outsider persisted, and he remained a figure marginalized by dialect, dress, and above all his ridiculous pretensions to assimilate into Gentile culture. Jewish fathers appeared as vicious or feeble, while would-be lovers and heroes drew nothing but scorn. The advent of a more sympathetic stage figure, what playwright and theatre manager William Dunlap termed the “white” Jew, challenged American audiences to embrace the message of religious freedom outlined in the Bill of Rights.<sup>4</sup> It invited spectators to jettison outmoded prejudices as legacies of European corruption. While this “white” Jew could not fully eradicate the persistence of anti-Jewish stereotypes on stage, he paved the way for a new generation of Jewish American playwrights and performers to explore questions of masculinity, citizenship, and belonging.

#### “A LIBERTY WHICH THEY CAN NOT ENJOY”

Any discussion of negative Jewish stereotypes in theatre begins almost inevitably with Shylock, and that starting point is particularly appropriate since he was the first Jewish character presented in the 1752 debut production of the colonies’ longest-lived theatrical touring troupe, the Hallam-Douglass Company. By the time of Shylock’s entrance on the colonial stage, the character’s name had already become a flexible pejorative, applied at will to slander Jews and some Gentiles engaged in money lending, trading, banking, etc. Shylock first appeared in the Williamsburg, Virginia, playhouse on September 15, 1752, in the Hallam family’s production of *The Merchant of Venice*. Although popular British perceptions of Shylock had undergone a substantial transformation with actor Charles Macklin’s revolutionary performance in 1741, the interpretation presented to American audiences in 1752 seems to have adhered to earlier notions of Shylock as a clownish character.<sup>5</sup> Before coming to America, some members of the Hallam family had been supporting players alongside Macklin and would likely have seen the great actor in his most famous role. In the eighteenth century, it was not unusual for lesser actors touring smaller venues to imitate star performers. Yet as theatre historian Hugh Rankin notes, the Irish actor playing Shylock with the Hallam Company, Patrick Malone, ignored “the latest interpretations of the role” and, according to one observer, “made the part that Shakespeare drew a mere farce” (in itself a telling comment, since it indicates that at least one member of the colonial audience knew that Shylock’s role had undergone



a transformation by the 1750s).<sup>6</sup> Between acts Malone performed on the slack rope and offered other acrobatic feats.<sup>7</sup> After Malone left the company, Lewis Hallam took over the role and continued to play it as a clown rather than as a villain.

The colonists witnessed their first “contemporary” interpretation of Shylock in 1768, by Mr. William Verling. Verling, a younger, more vibrant performer than Hallam, portrayed Shylock in the style that Macklin had pioneered, one that spectators described as “serious and sympathetic.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, “serious and sympathetic” describes the liminal status of Jews in the North American colonies. By the mid-eighteenth century, Jewish colonists had been granted greater rights than their counterparts in Europe, but Jewish settlers were still viewed askance by much of the country’s predominantly Gentile population.

Verling’s more complex rendition of the character also coincided with growing political tensions surrounding merchants who failed to comply with the nonimportation agreements implemented to protest the Townshend Acts of 1767.<sup>9</sup> Colonists were often denounced as “Jews” (regardless of their religious beliefs) and threatened with public circumcision if their political sympathies or economic interests led them to violate nonimportation pacts.<sup>10</sup> What greater affront could there be to a man’s pride than to threaten the most symbolically (and literally) masculine part of his body? Frustrated Gentile colonists resurrected the useful British stereotype of the venal Jew in a new, American context, conflating the image of the stage Jew with the conduct of their fellow citizens: The stereotyped Jewish character could represent both the tyrannical father (Shylock/Britain) and the traitorous colonist willing to betray fellow citizens for gold. For example, Haym Salomon, a prominent wartime broker, faced public backlash for his role in financing the Revolution both during the war and in the years immediately afterwards. In 1784 the *Independent Gazetteer* published an angry letter from Salomon refuting claims that “the Jews were the authors of high and unusual interest” in distributing stock for the Bank of North America. Yet critics continued to label him the “Jew broker,” who demonstrated “worse than Shylock’s temperament.”<sup>11</sup> Salomon was a multilingual Polish immigrant who had arrived in the United States around 1775 and rapidly transformed into “an ardent Whig.”<sup>12</sup> He became a shopkeeper and broker, and before long he was both an “unofficial underground agent for the Whigs” and broker to Robert Morris (often known as the “financier of the Revolution”). As Jacob Rader Marcus notes, by 1782 Salomon could advertise himself as “Broker to the Office

of Finance, to the Consul General of France, and the Treasurer of the French Army."<sup>13</sup> Yet despite his invaluable government service, he remained vulnerable to attack because of his Jewish heritage. Even those who collaborated closely with him demonstrated the kind of patronizing attitude so prevalent toward Jews in late eighteenth-century literature and drama, describing him as "our little friend." Similarly, Jacob I. Cohen—a broker from Richmond, Virginia, who frequently supplied funds to men such as James Madison—was labeled "the little Levite."<sup>14</sup> Marcus notes sarcastically that "if we were to draw anthropological conclusions" from the frequent use of the term "little" to describe Salomon, Cohen, and others, "we might assume that the Jews of the Revolutionary period were all small in stature."<sup>15</sup> While these diminutives may suggest some ironic level of acceptance, I argue that it functioned to reduce the status of Jews among the "real" men of the republic.<sup>16</sup>

The label of "little" was also a popular one attached to Jewish male characters seen on American stages. In Richard Brinsley Sheridan's popular comedy *The Duenna*, Isaac Mendoza (a Portuguese Jew who renounces both his citizenship and religion) is often called "Little Isaac," and Moses the moneylender in *The School for Scandal* is often labeled the "little fellow" and "little Moses."<sup>17</sup> Even Ben Hassan, the Jewish character in Susanna Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers* (discussed below), is referred to as a "little Israelite." These plays suggest that the labels had become ingrained in an Anglo-American vernacular and that despite the patriotic service of men such as Salomon and Cohen, their contemporaries still apostrophized them as "Jews" before they were "Americans," using the word "little" to underscore this diminished, outsider status.<sup>18</sup>

This pattern of attacks continued throughout the war and postwar era, even as Jewish financiers helped the would-be nation pay its armies and supply its troops, only to be met with accusations that they were charging outrageous interest or hoarding goods for the black market.<sup>19</sup> Wartime edicts further marginalized Jewish American men, as Test Acts<sup>20</sup> embedded in various state constitutions forbade Jews basic rights of citizenship (such as voting or office holding). These legal prohibitions dealt a serious blow to many Jewish Americans who had begun to pursue government appointments or election to public office as soon as the war broke out.<sup>21</sup> While these acts did not prohibit Jewish Americans from fighting in the war or financing the revolutionary effort, they proved a source of serious contention during the postwar years as Jewish American men were forced to petition state and federal governments for recognition. For example, in 1787, Philadelphian

Jonas Phillips (grandfather of future playwright Jonas B. Phillips) sent a letter to the Federal Constitutional Convention stating, "I . . . behold with Concern that among the laws in the Constitution of Pennsylvania there is a Clause [by which] a Jew is deprived of holding any publick office or place of Government." Phillips added that "It is well known . . . that the Jews have been true and faithful whigs & during the late contest with England they have been foremost with aiding and assisting the states . . . [and have] bravely fought and bled for a liberty which they can not Enjoy."<sup>22</sup> Phillips's assertion of Jewish bravery reminded the American government and the American people that Jewish men had displayed the same masculine virtues as their non-Jewish counterparts and thus merited the same rights and considerations. Ultimately, the federal Constitution *did* acknowledge the rights of Jews and other non-Christians to participate in the government: Article 6, section 3 notes that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."<sup>23</sup> This new mark of national acceptance was hailed in the 1788 Independence Day parade in Philadelphia. As Benjamin Rush described, the parade included a group of clergy and "The Rabbi of the Jews, locked in the arms of two ministers of the gospel, (it) was a most delightful sight. There could not have been a more happy emblem contrived, which opens all its power and offices alike, not only to every sect of Christians, but to worthy men of *every* religion [*sic*]."<sup>24</sup>

#### THE "MOCKERY OF THE WHOLE NATION"<sup>25</sup>

Despite symbolic public affirmations, the demonstrated courage of Jewish soldiers,<sup>26</sup> the public petitions of Jewish citizens, and even the ratification of the Constitution, postwar American stages continued to represent Jewish men as either villainous or cartoonish figures.<sup>27</sup> Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice* and the Beau Mordecai from Charles Macklin's *Love à la Mode* (1759) remained popular representations of Jewish men in early national playhouses, where they were soon joined by one of the first "American" entrants into the fray, Ben Hassan, the treacherous Renegado from Susanna Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers* (1794). As party politics grew increasingly fraught in postwar American society, "Jewishness" would take on new meaning among bickering parties seeking to sway voters to their sides.

Next to Shylock, the character of Mordecai in *Love à la Mode* was one of the most familiar Jewish roles for American theatregoers, and the comedy

remained popular for decades after its debut.<sup>28</sup> Macklin had written Mordecai as part of a collection of outsiders (Scottish, Irish, and Jewish) who aped the elite behaviors of the British upper classes. Michael Ragussis includes Macklin's Mordecai as part of his investigation of Jews' roles in mitigating Britain's transition to a capitalist system by facilitating discussions about Britain's expanding commercial ventures and the rise of the merchant class. Ragussis examines the role of comical outsider characters, which helped Britons establish a sense of what kinds of behaviors and traits were or were not acceptable in the burgeoning empire.<sup>29</sup>

Post-Revolutionary American society faced similar difficulties in negotiating who was entitled to participate in the postwar society as a man catapulted to wealth during or after the war challenged the old order and as immigrants attracted by the promise of the young republic streamed onto American shores. As Jeffrey H. Richards has argued, late eighteenth-century Americans imagined themselves on a "world stage," the focus of attention from a host of European political powers waiting for them to falter.<sup>30</sup> Macklin's triumvirate of "outsider" characters likely resonated with an anxious postwar community conscious that the new nation held the world's attention and was eager to "make good."

As *Love à la Mode* begins, the main female character, Charlotte, is discussing her suitors, which include an Irishman, a Scot, and Mordecai, the Jew. She paints Mordecai as "A beau Jew, who in spite of nature and education, sets up for a wit, a gentleman, and a man of taste." Her guardian authorizes her to "laugh at him as much as you will," and all the other characters mock his propensity for singing Italian opera and dressing in "all the colours of the rainbow."<sup>31</sup> As the Scottish suitor Sir Archy comments, "What a fantastical baboon this Eesrelite [*sic*] makes of himself. The fellow is the mockery of the whole nation."<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Macklin's text describes Mordecai as an "egregious coxcomb . . . striving to be witty, at the top of dress, with an awkward fancy of his own," and he proves a pompous ass, mocked by both insiders as well as his fellow outsiders.<sup>33</sup> Though written for the British stage, Mordecai's outsider status, as well as concerns about Jewish financial power, echoed images of Jewish Americans circulating in the public sphere.

As Alec Dun has noted, despite the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, American newspapers up until the mid-1790s frequently referenced the status of Jews in state and local politics throughout the United States, debating their fitness to participate in the new democracy.<sup>34</sup> A series of laws and public pronouncements had made the pro-

cess of finding grounds for any exclusion of Jews more challenging. The Naturalization Act of 1790 guaranteed citizenship to “free white persons.” That same year, President George Washington wrote a much-publicized letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, declaring that “the Government of the United States . . . gives to bigotry no sanction” and promising that as long as “those who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens,” they would be safe.<sup>35</sup> The Bill of Rights, officially implemented in 1791, offered further protection from religious discrimination. Thus, those wishing to exclude Jews from participating as equals in American society required a different rationale to disqualify them, and slurs leveled against Jewish Americans increasingly incorporated overtones of *racial* difference.<sup>36</sup> Comparing Jews to African Americans or other racial minorities offered a means to disavow Jews as “white” participants in the American polity.<sup>37</sup>

For example, in response to the 1793 election of a Jewish burgess in Easton, Virginia, the *Federal Gazette* observed sarcastically that while the election demonstrated the people’s “reason, philosophy, and toleration,” appointing a Jew to public office opened opportunities for other minorities. As the author notes, “my imagination fondly paints out to me the day—the rapidly approaching day—when every burgess will be a Jew and every town-clerk a negro.”<sup>38</sup> And the excesses of the French Revolution inspired the *General Advertiser* and the *Gazette of the United States* to report (with varying degrees of enthusiasm or concern) that the liberal treatment of France’s Jewish population seemed to be inspiring calls for more equal treatment of all *races* in the United States.<sup>39</sup>

Racialized depictions of Jews in the political realm found an echo in a 1794 review of *The Merchant of Venice*. Philadelphia’s pro-Democratic-Republican newspaper, the *Aurora*, described Mr. Chalmers’ performance of Shylock as follows: “He . . . gives full force to the original (character), he paints the hideous character of the sordid Jew in all its blackest colors.”<sup>40</sup> The review’s use of the term “blackest” hints at an identification of the Jew with a nonwhite race. The *Federalist Gazette of the United States* added, “Mr. Chalmers in Shylock was great. . . . What a Jew!”<sup>41</sup> Earlier that year, the *Gazette* had run a satirical piece about Jewish dietary laws, commenting, “We are informed . . . that the class of Citizens denominated JEWS [*sic*], propose at their next meeting in the synagogue, to appoint a Committee to . . . draw up a memorial to be presented to Congress, praying ‘An Act for the utter destruction throughout the United States, of that filthy race of quadrupeds

called Swine.”<sup>42</sup> Suggesting that Jews were a separate “class” of citizens, ridiculing their petitions to the government, and calling attention to kosher dietary practices that distinguished them from many of their fellow Americans offered yet more ways to marginalize them in the public imagination. As Sander Gilman notes, “the association of the Jews with Blackness is as old as Christian tradition” and can be dated back at least to medieval times, “but it is incorporated, not merely as an intellectual abstraction, but as the model through which Jews are perceived.”<sup>43</sup>

Like the pejorative comments in the newspapers cited above, Ben Hassan, the Jewish character in Susanna Rowson’s *Slaves in Algiers*, can be read as an attempt to police the American political sphere, not only by aligning Jews with “Turks and infidels” and enemies of the American people, but by figuratively “unmanning” the Jew as well (Hassan is forced to wear women’s clothing as a disguise).<sup>44</sup> Written as a response to an ongoing overseas crisis that witnessed numerous Americans kidnapped and held for ransom by Barbary pirates, Rowson’s drama presents the triumph of republican virtue and Christian charity over tyranny and all non-Christian religions, as a little band of American prisoners is liberated, a family is reunited, and the Dey of Algiers sees the error of his ways. Beyond the immediate crisis at the heart of the play, Rowson’s characterization of Ben Hassan disparages Jewish masculinity, implicitly questioning Jews’ eligibility for citizenship.

In *Slaves in Algiers*, Ben Hassan serves the Dey (to whom he has given his daughter, Fetnah) and keeps Christian hostages, one of whom he plans to marry against her will. In the list of *dramatis personae* Rowson describes Ben Hassan as a “Renegado,” a traitor to his faith.<sup>45</sup> Hassan “worships no deity but gold,” pits Christian against Muslim throughout the play, and always serves his own interests above all. When he is caught in his treachery at the end of the drama, he laments, “How shall I hide my monies? Oh, this is a Judgment fallen upon me for betraying Christians!”<sup>46</sup> Rowson’s portrayal of Ben Hassan in his role as a “broker” owes much to his craven predecessors on the British stage, though in *Slaves in Algiers*, Rowson focuses on republican principles rather than expanding capitalist marketplaces.<sup>47</sup> Still, audiences stung by tales of greedy wartime brokers (like those concerning Haym Salomon and Jacob Cohen mentioned above) might have linked Hassan’s greed with their own experience. By the mid-1790s, many Americans had grown frustrated by numerous postwar financial scandals such as those concerning the redemption of government bonds and currency, which the wartime government had used to finance the military. Often, investors

needing ready cash sold their bonds or notes to speculators at a considerable discount. Unscrupulous speculators then held the notes until they could be redeemed at their full (or nearly full) value, netting a considerable profit.<sup>48</sup> Just as the embargos of the 1760s had rekindled ugly Jewish stereotypes in the Gentile imagination, so postwar financial crises brought similar accusations. As Americans tried to embrace the selfless revolutionary-era message of *pro bono publico*, Hassan's treachery reminded them that choosing gold over duty would return them to the kind of servitude that they had escaped in the Revolution: "If anyone deserves slavery, it is he who could raise his own fortunes on the misery of others."<sup>49</sup>

### "A WHITE SHYLOCK"

Despite the challenges presented by lingering stereotypes and the relative instability of the postwar economy, during the second half of the 1790s stage Jews moved toward more sentimental and sympathetic roles. This was fueled largely by trends in European drama, including Gotthold Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, which would become an oft-cited tale in American periodicals. The shift in stage Jews' representations also coincided with an acrimonious showdown between America's emerging political parties.<sup>50</sup> On the surface, the rise of the philo-Semitic character and the Federalist/Republican schism would seem to have little connection. As various political and theatrical episodes from 1794 to 1809 suggest, however, party members invoked Jewish stereotypes and theatrical characters as a kind of shorthand to signify party allegiance. The section below examines ways in which efforts to "whiten" Jewish dramatic characters engaged with contemporary political debates.

As historian Jay Fliegelman has argued, both during and after the American Revolution, the patriarchal framework of colonial government gave way to new political, social, and cultural structures. Just as King George III had lost control of his subjects in the political realm, increasingly the dictatorial fathers of popular drama had to acknowledge their inability to retain control of their families. George Washington emerged as the nation's benevolent father figure, and American theatres witnessed a bevy of new, kindly parental role models, eager to protect and nurture the younger generation.<sup>51</sup>

As a postwar generation gained ascendancy and as voluntary governance became the order of the day, Jewish male characters underwent a transfor-



mation on the national stage and in popular fiction. This development coincided with and was fueled by the advent of more philo-Semitic characters in European literature as sentiment and melodrama edged out neoclassical forms. As I noted above, Lessing's 1779 drama *Nathan the Wise* offers one of the best examples of this revolution. Lessing's work began receiving attention in American periodicals by the first decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>52</sup> For more than eighty years after its initial publication, American authors drew on *Nathan the Wise* for parables of religious tolerance. Many focused on the famous "ring scene," in which Nathan tells the Saladin the story of a father debating what inheritance he should pass on to his three sons. The father had received a family ring representing the true faith, but could not decide which of his sons should receive it, so he had the ring copied and gave one to each. When the sons began to quarrel about whose ring was the real one (and by extension whose faith was the true faith, Jewish, Christian, or Muslim), a wise judge reminded the men the rings represented a symbol of their father's equal love for his three sons, and thus that each of their faiths was the true one. Numerous American journals either excerpted translations of the play or described the scene in anecdotal form, and they often linked the parable explicitly or implicitly to local religious debates. For example, on February 7, 1823, Charleston's *City Gazette* featured an essay on religious tolerance, citing Lessing and quoting the ring scene at length. The scene was also described in the *Berkshire Star* in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in 1827 (May 17), the *New York Evangelist* in 1842 (August 18), and the *Charleston Mercury* in 1859 (July 22), among other publications.

In addition to serving as fodder for American advocates of religious tolerance, *Nathan the Wise* had inspired a new wave of sympathetic Jewish fathers and father figures on British and American stages in the final years of the eighteenth century. In plays such as *The Jew, or the Benevolent Hebrew* (1794) and *The Jew and Doctor* (1799), elderly Jewish male characters who seem modeled on Nathan the Wise support pairs of young lovers by smoothing their paths to happiness. As noted above, Michael Ragussis links the rise of philo-Jewish characters in eighteenth-century British drama to the expansion of capitalist systems, arguing that the marriage motif often melded with the stage Jew's identity as broker and mitigated British anxieties about commercial culture: "The stage pointed the ways in which commerce—even, or especially, commerce with Jews—could broaden the sympathy and tolerance of the English people."<sup>53</sup> Some of the compassionate Jewish characters transplanted onto early American stages fulfilled a similar



function for US audiences in reassuring the country that it had embraced a message of tolerance. But while there was distinct overlap in issues of assimilation faced by Britain and America at the end of the eighteenth century, Americans also confronted a host of *new* questions related to the formation of national identity and national ideology that would shape audiences' reception of Jewish characters in the playhouse.<sup>54</sup>

Despite gestures toward tolerance, a portion of the population continued to imagine American citizenship as a Christian prerogative, and one of the most intriguing features of philo-Jewish plays presented to American audiences at the end of the eighteenth century is the repeated assertion that the Jewish characters are "more Christian than the Christians" in their conduct. Ragussis has suggested that new (or revised) stage images can only be effective when they resonate with audiences and when audiences have been primed to accept them by larger cultural discussions. Did these images of "Christian Jews" or "white" Jews prepare spectators to reimagine the familiar figure of the conniving Jewish father as something more recognizably sympathetic and "American"?<sup>55</sup> Ascribing Christian conduct to Jews may have struck Gentile spectators as a *reward* to Jewish Americans. That attribution signaled a qualified acceptance into the polity for Jewish characters able to overcome the stain of their inheritance. In a peculiar collision of politics and theatre, this same phenomenon played out in Philadelphia's bitter partisan battles of the 1790s.

It seems strange to imagine that a shift in perceptions about Jewish identity on the national stage might intersect with party politicking and the debate over a trade treaty, yet in the mid-1790s some more outspoken Federalists launched anti-Semitic attacks against members of the Democratic-Republican party, while Democratic-Republican newspaper editors replied with articles and theatrical reviews that seemed to defend Jewish rights. For example, the 1793 political cartoon "A Peep into the Anti-Federal Club" featured a Jewish politician, a black would-be Jacobin, and Satan (among other figures). The cartoon characters claim that "laws are unwholesome restraints on natural rights," and the central figure (identified by historian William Pencak as Philadelphia politician Israel Israel) proclaims, "To be or not to be a broker is the question . . ."<sup>56</sup> Israel Israel was a prominent Philadelphia Democrat, who, though not Jewish himself, had been born to a Jewish father (Israel Israel was baptized a Christian). By invoking the term "broker" (a trade often associated with Jews), the artist immediately linked Israel Israel with negative Jewish stereotypes. New York Federalist newspaper editor

James Rivington was even more explicit in a 1795 attack on Jewish politician Solomon Simon. Rivington claimed that Simon and his cronies had the "leering underlook" and "malicious grin" of the "tribe of Shylock."<sup>57</sup>

As William Pencak and Morton Borden have argued, a sudden, widespread anti-Jewish swing across the Federalist Party in the 1790s seems improbable. Rather the attacks suggest that the pluralistic makeup of the Democratic Party and its association with recent immigrants led Federalist newspapers such as the *Gazette of the United States* and *The Argus* to accuse the Democrats of representing "the revolutionary vermin of foreign countries," and being, as Rivington claimed, an "itinerant gang" made up of members "of the tribe of Shylock."<sup>58</sup> Rather than trying to name all the immigrant groups involved in the Democratic Party (French, Irish, German), the "Jews were an ideal scapegoat in this atmosphere."<sup>59</sup>

The fracas over Israel Israel and other Federalist anti-Jewish attacks throughout 1794 and 1795 apparently prompted one of the country's leading pro-Democratic newspapers, Philadelphia's *Aurora*, to rethink its rhetoric on Jewish Americans.<sup>60</sup> Only a year earlier, the *Aurora* had been quick to condemn Jewish villainy on- and offstage. Yet when "Jewishness" became identified with the Democratic Party the paper embraced and defended Jews. The *Aurora's* review of Richard Cumberland's play *The Jew, or the Benevolent Hebrew* provides a glimpse into ways in which audiences were being encouraged to reimagine the role of Jews in American society. The play pits the Jewish character of Sheva (or Sheba) against a group of Gentiles, one of whom, Charles, lacks sufficient funds to marry his ladylove, Eliza. Charles saves Sheva's life, and in return Sheva gives him enough money to marry, even making Charles the beneficiary of his will. Although the play is essentially a comic one, it offers echoes of Shylock's famous "hath not a Jew eyes" plea. Yet while Shylock's remarks carry a sense of irony and bitterness, Sheva's comments in *The Jew* demonstrate that he is, in fact, more "Christian" than his persecutors when he demands: "And what has Sheva done to be called villain? I am a Jew, what then? Is that a reason none of my tribe should have a sense of pity?"<sup>61</sup> Bache's *Aurora* praised the play and the author's avowed motive in creating it:

This piece has been written with the philanthropic view of rescuing from unmerited disgrace a nation whose character has been indiscriminately stamp with the infamy that belongs to some of the individuals composing it. In England, where the prejudice against Jews is strong, the comedy

met with considerable success, *but* in the hearts of an American audience, unfettered by prejudice, the sentiments it holds out found a foil perfectly congenial and the piece was received with distinguished applause.<sup>62</sup>

The *Aurora's* characterization of American audiences as "unfettered by prejudice" underscores popular claims that Americans had transcended Old World biases and corruption and that America was the natural home for such philanthropic sentiments.<sup>63</sup> The fact that national favorite Thomas Wignell played Sheva in the play's American debut may also have contributed to audiences' enthusiastic response. Wignell often portrayed characters whose simple honesty carried the day in the face of more elaborate manners and against the schemes of various villains. Perhaps most importantly, his characters often represented quintessentially *American* virtues.<sup>64</sup>

The *Aurora* offered the following observations on Wignell's performance: "The goodness of the Jew's heart conflicting with his habitual parsimony and love of gain, is happily expressed by Mr. Wignell. His manner and emphasis were remarkably appropriate. He wanted nothing but a better acquaintance with the dialect to complete the excellence of his performance."<sup>65</sup> Ironically the review underscored that even though the sentiments and behavior of the Jewish character had softened in Wignell's representation, traditional stage markers of Jewishness (including dialect) remained to allow non-Jewish audiences to identify the Jew as an outsider.

As playwright and New York theatre manager William Dunlap observed, "the idea of vindicating the Jews and bringing forward on the stage a kind of white Shylock is certainly a very happy one."<sup>66</sup> And Lee Friedman has commented that Cumberland's *The Jew* "set a fashion in Jewish heroes," marking the more philo-Semitic trend noted above.<sup>67</sup> Yet not all Americans embraced a "white" Jew as an acceptable addition to the political system. Ongoing party bickering and disagreements over the hotly contested Jay Treaty (a trade agreement in 1794) provoked some protreaty Federalists to escalate their anti-Jewish attacks against their opponents beyond those already detailed above in connection to Jews' supposed Jacobin sympathies.<sup>68</sup> For example, Pencak describes the scene in 1795 Philadelphia in which "Treaty" and "No Treaty" parties faced off against each other. An anonymous author in the *Gazette of the United States* suggested that those who opposed the treaty should leave the United States in a "second going out of the children of Israel, or rather of *Israel Israel*."<sup>69</sup> The repetition of "Israel" was yet another allusion to Israel Israel's Jewish ancestry. The

attacks persisted, with some Federalist papers not only continuing their anti-Jewish comments but accusing the Democrats of exploiting and even manufacturing anti-Jewish incidents to serve their own purposes. *Gazette* editor John Fenno and Israel Israel eventually came to blows over the issue. The physical outburst is noteworthy, as Israel asserted a traditional masculine prerogative of defending his honor and demonstrating his strength in an open display of violence. The brawl, however, only spurred Fenno to continue his attacks, as he later printed a reference to Israel as a “Jewish Tavern Keeper with a very Jewish name.”<sup>70</sup> As the attacks printed in Fenno’s paper suggest, simply calling a man a Jew was not only an insult, but for some it remained sufficient grounds for excluding him from participating in any kind of public office or debate.

### “SHYLOCK IS NOT A JEW, BUT A MAN”

As Harley Erdman has observed, various terms of reference (including Israelite, Hebrew, Jew, and Jewish) have been employed either descriptively or derogatively to refer to both religious and ethnic identities of Jewish Americans. The question of whether or not it was an insult to describe a man as a Jew continued to be debated on the American stage and in the American public sphere at the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>71</sup> As a new century dawned, Federalist attempts to “other” Jews in the public sphere seemed increasingly vicious and futile. The smokescreen of anti-Jewish prejudice could no longer mask the deficiencies in their own party rhetoric. As the Age of Reason slid into a sentimental democracy, American audiences identified new criteria for citizenship. They also turned to stage characters that represented emotional rather than intellectual truths and characters whose appreciation of virtue qualified them for participation in the republic.

In the theatre, a popular afterpiece, Thomas Dibdin’s *The Jew and Doctor* (1799), introduced audiences to a new Jewish character whose conduct threatened the stability of certain religious markers of identity, and a popular actor unveiled a new, more appealing Shylock. Outside playhouse doors, the first decades of the nineteenth century gave hope to some Jews that it would no longer be necessary to conceal their faith or their differences.

Thomas Dibdin’s *The Jew and Doctor* opened in the United States with John Bernard in the role of the Jew, Abednego.<sup>72</sup> Bernard, a comedian of some repute at London’s Covent Garden Theatre, had joined Philadelphia’s

Chestnut Street company in 1797 (possibly as a replacement for the aging and ailing Thomas Wignell). He became an instant favorite with local audiences for his balanced, nuanced depictions of comic characters.<sup>73</sup> In *The Jew and Doctor* Abednego has rescued and raised a genteel Christian orphan named Emily (whom he always refers to as "Miss" Emily). Throughout the course of the play he selflessly lends money to Emily's would-be suitor and finally becomes the means of reuniting Emily with her long-lost father (the "Doctor" of the title). Here again, the audience sees a Jewish character whose conduct is more "Christian" than that of the real Gentiles in the play. For example, during one exchange with Mr. Bromley, his prospective son-in-law's father, Bromley disparages Abednego, blustering "You dealer in dirty water, you dabbler in discount—you old, old—Jew you!" To which Abednego replies, "Anyting more vat you can call ma? Can you trow noting in ma face but ma religion? I vish wid all ma heart I could return the compliment."<sup>74</sup> When Bromley later asks Abednego's pardon for hurting his feelings, the wronged man replies, "if Christians *profess* forgiveness of injuries, Jews can sometimes practice it."<sup>75</sup> Though still played as a comic role, Abednego represented an intriguing addition to the repertoire of Jewish roles, as well as the prototype for a new concept of Jewishness in Anglo-American culture: the religious or ethnic Jew whose sympathetic outlook could pass for that of a Christian and whose actions were sometimes even *more* Christian than his Gentile detractors.<sup>76</sup>

American audiences entered the nineteenth century with, in addition to more benevolent Jewish fathers, a passionate new interpretation of Shylock created by star actor Thomas Abthorpe Cooper. Cooper's Jew left the "hideous character" of the postwar theatre behind (at least temporarily). Cooper was born in Ireland and mentored by philosopher William Godwin. He possessed a "fine person, a voice of great compass, of most melodious silver tone . . . an eye of the most wonderful expression; and his whole face expressive, at his will, of the deepest terror . . . the direst revenge, or the softest pity. His form in anger was that of a demon; his smile in affability that of an angel."<sup>77</sup> Cooper's many portraits show him as a handsome, virile man with a volatile and passionate countenance. He helped to revolutionize the tragic style in the early American theatre, transforming it from the more restrained form inherited from neoclassical actors such as John Phillip Kemble toward the romantic mode of George Frederick Cooke. Cooper's Shylock offered a compelling representation of Jewish masculinity and proved a far cry from the comic parodies of the early eighteenth century, or even from Macklin's

middle-aged villain.<sup>78</sup> Many of the reviews describing Cooper's Shylock contend that he simultaneously embodied "the Jew that Shakespeare drew" while transcending the Jew's most objectionable qualities. Astonishingly, an article in the 1799 *Mercantile Adviser* claims that Cooper's interpretation of Shylock had reconciled even Jews to the role: "Formerly the adherents to the Mosaic law felt sore at the representation of Shylock, but since that liberal system of policy has prevailed which beams a sun of promise throughout the clouded and perturbed atmosphere of the eighteenth century, that ancient and truly venerable sect smile upon the misconceptions of barbarous ages." The review adds that Cooper had revealed himself in that line in which he so excels, "the line of passion," and that "the passions and behavior of Shylock have been mistakenly looked upon by vulgar spectators as appropriate to a peculiar people, but it is in fact a picture of nature. Shylock is not a Jew, but a man; an oppressed, injured, insulted, despised man."<sup>79</sup>

An offstage parallel to these revised perceptions of Jewish masculinity appears in the words of Benjamin Nones, a French-born Revolutionary War hero, famous for his eloquent defense of Jewish rights. Nones took issue with Federalists who argued that Jewish heritage alone should be sufficient criteria to exclude Jews from the privileges of citizenship. As he asserted in his oft-cited reply to anti-Jewish comments made by the Federalist editor of the *Gazette of the United States*, "I glory in belonging to that persuasion . . . on which christianity itself was originally founded . . . whose votaries have never murdered each other in religious wars, or cherished the theological hatred so general, so unextinguishable among those who revile them." He adds, "How then can a Jew but be a Republican? In America particularly?"<sup>80</sup> Nones makes a claim for Jews as perhaps the *most* American citizens in the new nation and as those best qualified by virtue of their tolerance and patience to participate in the new republic.

As noted in the introduction, around the time of Nones' declaration, there were fewer than 3,000 Jewish residents in the United States. The total US population in 1800 was approximately 5.3 million (including more than 800,000 slaves); thus Jews represented a miniscule portion of the population (~.0006 percent). Given these figures, the pro-and anti-Jewish debates I have cited above can hardly be the result of overwhelming numbers.

Nones, Salomon, Phillips, and other Jewish American patriots found themselves empowered by prorepublican rhetoric and political safeguards that seemed to offer greater protection than they or their ancestors had known previously. Before coming to the United States, many Jewish Ameri-

cans had experienced persecution elsewhere and had learned that silent endurance was often the safest policy until they could move themselves and their families to safer settings. Shylock, Sheva, and Abednego each model this familiar practice of patiently bearing insults and injustices; as Shakespeare's Shylock declares to Antonio, "sufferance is the badge of all our tribe." By contrast, Nones, Phillips, Salomon, and others *embraced* their visibility as Jews, transforming it into a point of pride and a qualification for political participation rather than a liability.

An incident in the Charleston playhouse suggests that some Jewish American theatre patrons also refused to wait patiently for others to free the stage from offensive Jewish stereotypes. In 1804, the *Massachusetts Spy* reported that the Charleston theatre company (then under the management of Alexander Placide) had "declined performing" *The Merchant of Venice* "at the special request of the gentlemen of the Jewish nation in that city."<sup>81</sup> Placide's company had recently returned to Charleston from a sojourn in Savannah, another city with a well-established Jewish population.<sup>82</sup> Both the request to omit the production and the decision to honor it signal a shift in attitude since a 1787 advertisement for a Charleston production of *Merchant*, which had proudly promised "An admirable play" showing "female virtue triumphing over false delicacy" in Portia's pleas to "impress in the mind of the cruel Jew the virtue of Mercy."<sup>83</sup>

Like other urban populations throughout the United States, Charlestonians had a tradition of linking theatrical productions to larger political or social issues. For example, during the Revolution a Charleston newspaper printed a protest from a local audience member arguing that it was unseemly for the city to enjoy dramatic entertainments while Britain blockaded Boston's port. The 1804 protest against *The Merchant of Venice* suggests a similar understanding of the symbolic power of theatre to convey specific cultural messages or endorse certain social beliefs. Given that the protest seems to have been successful, it also argues for the secure standing of the city's Jewish citizens, who presumably felt free to declare their concerns openly without fear of public or private retribution. Indeed, Charleston's Jewish community was so well-established by the early nineteenth century that playwright A. B. Lindsley could reference the Jewish residents on Charleston's King Street in his 1809 comedy *Love and Friendship, or Yankee Notions* and assume that his New York audience would understand the allusion to the city's most populous Jewish neighborhood.<sup>84</sup> Pencak notes that Jews and Gentiles often collaborated on business and charitable ventures in Charleston (though Jews



were not part of the city's elite planter culture).<sup>85</sup> They also supported each other's ventures. For example, in 1801, members of Charleston's Jewish community founded the Hebrew Orphan Society, an organization that would endure for decades and that would attract the sponsorship of both Jews and non-Jews. While Jews and Gentiles united in numerous charitable and business ventures in Charleston, I mention the city's Hebrew Orphan Society in particular because in addition to describing its philanthropic function, the group's constitution proudly describes the United States as a nation where,

Freedom and equal rights, religious, civil, and political, are liberally extended them [Israelites] in common with every other branch of citizens; and where no longer oppressed or contracted by the contracted policy and intolerant spirit, which before the happy dawn of liberty and philanthropy had circumscribed those natural rights granted by an Almighty God . . . they can and may freely assume an equal station in that favored land with the cheering conviction that their virtues and acquirements may lead them to every honor and advantage their fellow citizens can attain.<sup>86</sup>

The first decade of the nineteenth century seemed to mark an era of greater hope that it would not be necessary for Jews to continue concealing their faith or their differences. In some ways the transition to more sentimental Jewish types on the national stage and the call to eradicate Shylock from the repertoire (despite Cooper's moving portrayal) mirrored the transformation in both the theatre and in American politics at the turn of the nineteenth century. The sentimental Jew now offered a compelling counterpoint to his clownish counterpart, challenging audiences—as Abednego did—to examine their own biases in dismissing a man simply because he was a Jew. Perhaps part of the explanation for the shift in public opinion lies in the Federalists' waning influence in realms they had once dominated. By 1800 the Federalist Party found itself challenged and isolated in the playhouse, as new audiences clamored for more democratic fare. Discouraged, former Federalist cronies abandoned the theatre as an effective site for disseminating their preferred images of American national identity.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, the country was moving toward a more broadly tolerant religious policy. Thomas Jefferson's deism allowed for a greater breadth of religious acceptance, and he "appointed ethnic as well as practicing Jews to public office."<sup>88</sup> As Abednego notes at the end of *The Jew and Doctor*, "If ever you see



a helpless creature what need your assistance, give it for my sake. And if the object should not even be a Christian, remember that *humanity* knows no difference of opinion.”<sup>89</sup>

“IT IS TIME THAT THERE SHOULD BE A JEW PRESIDENT”

“It is time that there should be a Jew President,” declared Mordecai Manuel Noah in 1824.<sup>90</sup> Noah—one-time sheriff of New York, newspaper editor, US consul, theatre critic, playwright, Tammany Democrat, and would-be politician—made this statement in response to the year’s crowded and contentious field of presidential candidates. Although Noah’s offer to run for president was made tongue-in-cheek, it underscored “the gap separating myth and reality in Americans’ view of the Jew” and emphasized that “many of the rights offered the Jews in theory, seemed shocking indeed when discussed in a practical way.”<sup>91</sup> More than twenty years after Benjamin Nones’ impassioned declaration that Jewishness and republican identity were inherently linked, and despite guarantees in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, Jewish American men still found their heritage a barrier to political service and social acceptance. And notwithstanding the welcome advent of more sympathetic Jewish male figures onstage, old negative stereotypes from Shylock to the Beau Mordecai resurfaced periodically in the repertoire. As a member of the post-Revolutionary generation, Mordecai Noah labored to emancipate his people and the American theatre from these outdated stereotypes. He would become one of the best-known antebellum playwrights, and his popular works appeared in playhouses for years. The determined patriotism of his plays testifies to his hope that a reconfiguration of the criteria for citizenship and belonging might be showcased onstage, even as he seemed curiously reluctant openly to integrate Jewish Americans into his dramas.

Born in 1785, Noah was related to some of the nation’s most prominent and politically active Jewish families. After growing up in Philadelphia and Charleston, he eventually settled in New York, where he would feel the sting of anti-Jewish bias numerous times throughout his career.<sup>92</sup> In 1813 he had been appointed as consul to Tunis, a prestigious position that boded well for his future prospects. But soon after his appointment he was ignominiously recalled, ostensibly on the grounds that his Jewish faith impeded his ability to fulfill his duties. The letter he received from James Monroe stated that “at the time of your appointment . . . it was not known that the religion

which you profess would form any obstacle to the exercise of your Consular functions. Recent information, however . . . proves that it would produce a very unfavorable effect."<sup>93</sup> Noah protested vehemently. In a letter to Moses Manassah Noah, he noted that "President Madison gave me the appointment of the Consul at Tunis. I was the first Jew who had received this mark of public confidence. . . . Just at the moment when the public relations were on the best possible footing and I was flattering myself with the hope that my conduct was approved, I was recalled & disgraced. The ostensible cause was my religion."<sup>94</sup> Jonathan Sarna argues, however, that while Noah publicly attributed his recall to American anti-Jewish bias, both he and the government tacitly acknowledged more complex causes at the root of his failure, factors ranging from the government's secret agenda regarding specific military initiatives to the Turks' open resistance to dealing with Jews. As Sarna observes, "both the administration and Noah exploited anti-Jewish prejudice for their own purposes."<sup>95</sup> In 1819, the same year that his phenomenally successful play *She Would Be a Soldier* debuted, Noah published *Travels in England, France, Spain, and the Barbary States in the Years 1813–1814 and 1815*. Part travelogue, part polemic, *Travels* combined Noah's observations on foreign cultures with yet another passionate defense of his time in Tunis.

Noah's career is full of such curious paradoxes. He was a man of enormous talent with, as Sarna notes, "a strong sense of Jewish identity" and a lifelong devotion to causes that led to his involvement in everything from Jewish charities to an 1825 scheme to found a Jewish homeland in upstate New York. Yet throughout his life he was consumed by a desire for "power, prestige, and fame" that sometimes seems to have led him to downplay his Jewish heritage. This pattern is most evident in his dramatic writings, which feature no openly Jewish characters. As Sarna has observed, Noah's other works often discuss topics of Jewish history or Jewish tradition, but such an omission in his plays (even those featuring his uncle, Aaron Phillips) seems curious in a man so determined to defend the rights of Jewish Americans. Such omissions point to the aforementioned "gap separating myth and reality in Americans' view of the Jew."

Could it be possible, however, that despite the absence of any overtly Jewish figures in his plays, Noah still addressed issues related to the formation of Jewish male identity? Given Noah's passionate patriotism and his pride in his heritage it seems hard to imagine that he would not have found some way to combine the two in his dramatic writings. Did Noah opt to create "double-coded" Jewish characters in his dramas?<sup>96</sup> Generally, early

nineteenth-century Jewish stage characters required little “decoding”; their Jewishness (however it might be defined by playwright, performer, or audience member) was a conspicuous element of their presentation. Double-coded characters rely on nuance and actor-author-audience complicity. As Bial argues, a double-coded interpretation presents a “supplemental” reading of a text or a performance, rather than one given in automatic opposition to a dominant group: “Such supplemental readings arise from a shared awareness between the writer/performer and the audience, a mutual act of memory-making that is intrinsic to performance itself.”<sup>97</sup> Using Bial’s notion of “double-coding” it becomes possible to imagine Noah’s texts as addressing Jewish subjects in more subtle ways.

Exploring this “mutual act” of memory making between Noah and his audience might begin with an 1822 painting of the Park Theatre (fig. 1). John Searle’s well-known image of the playhouse shows only a sliver of the stage, focusing its attention instead on the spectators, who are depicted in unusual detail. In 1868, Elias Dexter reprinted the image, identifying eighty-four of the individuals shown in the audience, including Noah, who sits in the pit in the same row as William Bell, Hugh Maxwell, John Lang, William H. Maxwell, and Henry N. Cruger. The particular grouping of these men may have been a conceit of the artist, but Searle’s painting groups together individuals who would have been professional associates as well as champions for common causes. Noah and the two Maxwells were recognized as “literary men” in 1820s New York.<sup>98</sup> Noah and Lang were both newspaper editors (of the *National Advocate* and the *New York Gazette*, respectively) as well as supporters of the New York Mechanics Association. Finally, Hugh Maxwell and Lang were members of the St. Andrews Society.<sup>99</sup> Mapping these links makes it easier to conjecture how a mutual act of memory making might occur in this context, and it serves as a reminder of how closely connected the comparatively small theatre-going population of Noah’s New York would have been in the 1820s. The image also highlights Noah’s conspicuousness in the theatre and in New York society.

A group like the one imagined in Searle’s painting would have been perfectly primed to interpret double-coded messages in Noah’s 1819 comic hit *She Would Be a Soldier*. The in-jokes begin with the play’s title, which puns on Frederick Pilon’s popular British comedy *He Would Be a Soldier*, a well-known piece in the early American repertoire that had debuted in the United States in 1788 and had even been played during the War of 1812 to raise money for the Harlaem and Brooklyn Heights Fund.<sup>100</sup> The original British



Fig. 1. Watercolor of the interior of the Park Street Theatre by John Searle, 1822. (Watercolor on paper, 38x23 inches; #1875.3. Photography © New-York Historical Society.)

piece features comical French and English men and women from various social classes all involved in a complicated game of identity swapping. Noah's play takes Pilon's plot device one step further and adds diverse racial and ethnic types to the international mix, including a Native American<sup>101</sup> and a stage Yankee alongside the French and English characters satirized in Pilon's source play. Throughout Noah's comedy (set during the War of 1812) characters borrow the clothing of other ethnic or racial groups, and even of other genders. The heroine, Christine, refuses to marry her father's choice, Jerry Mayflower, and so disguises herself as a young soldier to follow her love, Lieutenant Lenox, into battle. In one of the play's subplots, the haughty British Captain Pendragon and his French counterpart, LaRole, costume themselves as Indians in an effort to elude capture. Noah expands on the identity swapping of his source material by introducing more ethnic and racial groups that were distinctively "American."

Many scholars have focused on Noah's use of disguise in this play and his manipulation of gender and ethnic identity as a key to his coded messages in the text. Craig Kleinman suggests that the play can "be read as potentially subversive . . . because it is a performance which not only plays off, but carnivalizes the multiple b/orders that limit those deemed Other, such as Noah, an outspoken Jewish writer." Kleinman asserts that Noah "turns the world upside-down by splitting his many 'Jewish selves' among the drama's non-Jewish characters."<sup>102</sup> He also links the play to the furor over Noah's dismissal as consul four years earlier. Rachel Rubenstein extends Kleinman's discussion, noting that while there are no Jewish characters specifically named in the drama, Noah includes comments that might be interpreted by some Jewish audience members as alluding to the forced migration of the Jews, particularly the Indian chief's angry rebuttal to the American appeal for friendship among natives and whites: "You came with the silver smile of peace . . . but when your numbers increased, you rose like wolves upon us . . . sent us in tribes into the wilderness."<sup>103</sup> For Rubenstein, Noah's play highlights "the political and cultural fragmentation" of a society riven by political, religious, ethnic, and class debates. Rubenstein adds that "if Noah meant to celebrate a polyethnic America, he also revealed a certain anxiety about its effects."<sup>104</sup> Kleinman's and Rubenstein's discussions suggest the challenges Noah faced in reconciling his American patriotism with his Jewish nationalism. Yet their compelling and extremely detailed analyses do not extend to an analysis of the play in production. Additionally, Kleinman and Rubenstein focus on the characters that are most obviously foreign



or masquerading and overlook the character whose actions and attitudes launch the conflict of the piece: Christine's father, Jasper.

The popularity of the play meant that it was performed throughout the country by hundreds of different actors over a period of thirty or forty years. It is not feasible to trace each of these performers, but I am interested in the possibilities that open up in Noah's script when, in the early 1830s, the role of Jasper was played by Noah's uncle, the well-known Jewish stage actor Aaron Phillips.<sup>105</sup> *She Would Be a Soldier* begins with a question addressed to Jasper by his friend Mr. Jenkins: "And so, neighbor, you are not then a native of this village?"<sup>106</sup> In the first moments of the comedy Noah calls attention to the fact that a man might be a "neighbor" and may not be native-born. The question seems a transparent plot device to allow Jasper to reveal that, although foreign, he is no exaggerated comic type like many of the other characters in the play, but a brave soldier who fought on behalf of his adopted country and stayed after the Revolution to settle the new nation.<sup>107</sup> The fact that this character was often played by Aaron Phillips, a Jewish actor (whose antecedents extended back to the Revolutionary era), might invite audiences to read the Jew as an assimilated part of the American community.<sup>108</sup> While he may still be recognizably foreign in origin (as the opening line of the play attests), this proves no bar to his integration into American culture. He appears as the one character in the play uniquely able to appreciate republican virtues.<sup>109</sup> He is also the character who embodies the Revolutionary generation.

Linking Phillips's Jewish identity to Jasper and to Noah's ideas about Jewish nationalism and American patriotism may seem too speculative a series of connections to attribute to the audience's imagination. Yet I return to Searle's 1822 painting of the Park Theatre, with its depiction of a closely connected audience who boasted not only a series of overlapping interests, but very likely intimate knowledge of each other's affairs as well. Theatrical reviews of the 1820s and 1830s would sometimes remark on the Noah-Phillips connection, and among this kind of closely connected audience, the conjunction of Noah's play and Phillips's performance allows for the type of "supplemental reading" that Bial describes as an integral aspect of "double-coding." Could spectators witnessing Phillips in the role of Jasper see the Jewish body onstage as one of the *most* American ones in the play, rather than seeing the Jew as a set of refracted "other" identities parceled out among a host of ethnic and racial stereotypes?<sup>110</sup> It may not have happened at every performance, but Carlson's concept of ghosting suggests that the *potential*

for this type of reading must have existed among audiences accustomed to comparing and contrasting multiple interpretations of the same role over a span of years. Perhaps it is that sense of possibility that makes Jasper an intriguing masculine role model: he has the potential to be read as a Jewish character, without the requirement that he be portrayed as stereotypically "Jewish." Such a reading would depend on audience members' awareness of either Noah's or Phillips's background. In that, the character's potentiality mirrors that of so many Jewish Americans whose conspicuousness waxed and waned depending on the political, social, and economic climate.

Noah authored numerous plays, some patriotic in theme and others inspired by European models and stories. Perhaps his most personal play was the now lost *Yusef Caramalli; or, The Siege of Tripoli*. Audiences familiar with the circumstances of Noah's dismissal from his consul's post in Tunis would have seen a rich opportunity for a mutual act of memory making in this drama about the plight of American captives overseas. While no copy of the play has yet been located (though it is listed in various newspapers as available for purchase as late as 1827), a lengthy summary in the *New-York Literary Journal* offers an overview of the plot, which bears some resemblance to Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers* and other Algerian captivity stories.

*Yusef Caramalli* appeared in 1820, one year after the success of *She Would Be a Soldier*. Sarna describes the drama as combining "the former consul's personal knowledge of Barbary with standard patriotic fare."<sup>111</sup> Audiences familiar with or sensitive to the difficulties facing Jewish citizens might have recalled previous texts and publications that would have allowed them to interpret Noah's version of the story as a subtle form of resistance to anti-Semitic stage types. Stage tales of captives held by Barbary pirates had been popular for more than two decades, appearing in various forms including comedies, romances, and ballets.<sup>112</sup> Two of the most well-known dramatic renderings included Susanna Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers* (noted above) and James Ellison's 1812 drama *The American Captive, or the Siege of Tripoli* (which features a treacherous Jewish character named Ishmael). Based on the clues in the newspaper plot summary, Noah's version may present a disruption of this familiar plot gambit, offering the mysterious character of Hassan Ben Ali. I describe him as mysterious because, although his name recalls Rowson's "Ben Hassan" of thirty years before, Noah's character does not appear to be Jewish; the only extant description of the play offers no guidance on that point. The summary describes Hassan as the guardian of the American captives, but also suggests that he colludes with the hero of the

piece, American lieutenant Harry Mountfort, to free the prisoners.<sup>113</sup> Unlike Jewish characters in other works that conspire against Gentile American captives, Hassan's role appears more sympathetic.

The stage production opened at the Park Street Theatre on May 15, 1820, and boasted elaborate pyrotechnics as well as a number of real American sailors recruited for the cast.<sup>114</sup> The *New-York Literary Journal* recalled that excited audiences shouted for Noah to show himself at the opening night, but that he modestly declined. But "on the second night . . . such was the renewed clamor for the Author, that a serious disturbance was anticipated; to prevent which he appeared in the side boxes, and after shouts and applause, order was restored."<sup>115</sup> Critics hailed the play's authenticity not only in terms of scenic effects and casting, but in the story as well. The *New-York Literary Journal* observed that "the local allusions, with which the play abounds" were "enjoyed with keen relish by the audience."<sup>116</sup> Various newspaper articles reminded audiences about Noah's unique qualifications for telling the story. The *New-York Gazette* noted that "Mr. Noah is so familiar with Turkish manners and customs, he is well calculated to delineate such scenes."<sup>117</sup> The play stayed in the repertoire for more than fifteen years and became a patriotic favorite. Its association with Noah's Jewish identity also remained a factor in shaping audiences' interpretation of the piece. For example, in 1822, Philadelphia's *Saturday Evening Post* described a production at the Walnut Street Theatre. The paper reminded audiences that Noah "was for several years a Consul at one of the Barbary ports, whence, however, he was recalled by this government on the score of his religion."<sup>118</sup> And as late as 1841, an essay in *The Dramatic Mirror* recalled the play's stinging political message, noting that it was "so redolent of villainous saltpeter, brimstone, sulphur, and blue and red lights, that it set fire to the theatre and burnt it to the ground." While this was partly an allusion to the burning of the Park Street playhouse on the opening night of the production, it also recalled the controversy over Noah's own experience with anti-Semitism, since the article went on to remind readers that Noah had been sheriff of New York up until 1824, when the post became an elected rather than an appointed one. The paper asserted that "the only reason ever given for turning him out was that 'the people thought it devilish hard that a Jew should hang a Christian!'"<sup>119</sup> Most striking among these various reviews is the context of alleged anti-Jewish bias that shaped critics' descriptions of Noah's work for more than two decades. Indeed, theatre critics and newspaper editors appear to have encouraged this interpretation of his dramatic career to the point that



it would have been difficult for audiences to forget that Noah was Jewish. Noah apparently had little need to write openly Jewish characters when he could produce coded fathers, paternal surrogates, or even avatars for his own experience who could convey his thoughts on patriotism and national affiliation equally effectively.

### "THE OLD GLORIES OF THE RACE OF JUDAH"

One month after *Yusef Caramalli* opened in New York and led to the destruction of the Park Theatre, an American adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's phenomenally successful *Ivanhoe* was presented by members of the Park Street Theatre company in their temporary lodgings on Anthony Street. No doubt the company counted on *Ivanhoe* to help reclaim some of their lost revenue. Scott's novel had taken British and American readers by storm and featured what would become some of the most popular Jewish characters in stage history. It told the tale of Wilfred of Ivanhoe, a Saxon knight divided between loyalties to his Saxon heritage and the Norman king, Richard the Lionheart. He also finds himself torn between his attraction to Rebecca, the beautiful Jewess who saves his life when he is wounded, and his fiancée, the Saxon Lady Rowena. Much to her dismay, Rebecca also attracts the notice of Sir Brian de Bois-Guilbert, who tries to force her to become his concubine (or to convert and marry him). For the crime of "bewitching" a Templar, Rebecca is tried and found guilty. She is sentenced to be burned, but her father, Isaac, beseeches Ivanhoe to fight on her behalf. He does so and Rebecca is freed, whereupon she and her father flee for Granada, fearing further persecution. *Ivanhoe* certainly raised the conspicuousness of Jewish characters on the national stage, and its American premiere also coincided with an escalation in the debates about the legal rights of Jewish men to participate in the American polity, particularly in the notorious case of Maryland's "Jew Bill."

The conspicuousness of the Jewish characters in *Ivanhoe* and the importance of their religious and racial identity appear in same issue of the *New-York Literary Journal* that describes the opening night of *Yusef Caramalli*. That issue also features an article comparing and contrasting three separate British stage productions of *Ivanhoe*. The journal complained that the Drury Lane Theatre production had largely excised "Jewishness" from the character of Isaac: "Isaac, in his [the playwright's] hands, is not the Jew

of York—or any Jew at all, but a passionate and metaphysical old man in a strange gabardine. There is none of the abjectness of spirit that makes his courage when inspired by parental love so sublime—little of the inimitable struggle between his fondness for gold and for his daughter—and few of those admirable Hebraisms which in the novel carry the mind back to the old glories of the race of Judah.”<sup>120</sup> The author’s assertion that Isaac does not appear or sound Jewish *enough*, and that his cowardice and love of gold (presumably the character traits that identify him as Jewish) must be present to set off any act of paternal devotion is particularly striking, as is his reflection that the Covent Garden and Surrey Theatre productions were more successful because they retained favorite scenes from the novel (such as the scene in Isaac’s house when Rebecca saves Ivanhoe). While the article obviously describes three British productions, the author assumed American audiences would be interested in the treatment of Jewish characters. Another newspaper, *The American*, praised playwright Thomas Dibdin’s rendering of Isaac as “obstinate but feeling” and said that Isaac was “a character so heightened in the play . . . that he occupies the mind of the audience from beginning to end.” The paper also notes that Isaac’s “parental affection” for Rebecca rendered the character “an object of affection” himself.<sup>121</sup> Three days later, *The American* noted that the role of Isaac had been chosen for an actor’s benefit night. Such a choice points not only to the popularity of the play but to the appeal of Isaac’s character as one that attracted audiences.<sup>122</sup> In recalling Jewish actor H. B. Phillips’s depiction of Isaac before Philadelphia audiences, historian Henry Morais notes that “many persons have a distinct recollection of his forceful and pathetic impersonation of Isaac of York, the unfortunate Jew in the dramatized version of Sir Walter Scott’s beauteous novel of ‘Ivanhoe.’”<sup>123</sup>

Although many American newspapers had praised Scott’s novel and eagerly anticipated the American stage adaptation, the *Baltimore Federal Republican* presented a different take on the work’s significance for Jewish and American audiences. In an essay from March of 1820, the newspaper lamented that Scott’s novel had done Jews “an incalculable injustice.” The paper compared Scott to Cumberland (author of the 1794 drama *The Jew, or the Benevolent Hebrew*), who, despite his good intentions, had fallen into “the most vulgar error” in depicting Jewish characters.<sup>124</sup> But the diatribe did not stop with this complaint against the treatment of Jewish characters on stage and in popular novels. The author added, “even in our country, which we also boast of as an asylum for *all* the oppressed; the guarantee of equal rights among all mankind;

the temple of the Living God where *all* may meet and worship as they please; [some] are deprived of the rights of freemen; shut out from usefulness; forbidden to be great or good, and banished from all opportunities of achieving to themselves a name among the benefactors of mankind; among statesmen, soldiers, or magistrates. . . . What then shall we say to others who have it in their power to do them justice?"<sup>125</sup> On the surface, it appears puzzling that a Baltimore newspaper would take such an adamant stance against Cumberland and Scott and offer such a passionate plea for Jewish rights. The issue hit close to home, however. When the *Ivanhoe* essay appeared in 1820, the Maryland government was still debating the "Jew Bill" to restore the full rights and privileges of citizenship to the state's Jewish male citizens, so any discussion of Jewish representation would have struck a sensitive spot. A brief overview of the complex history of the Maryland Jew Bill debate may illuminate its connection to US stage productions of *Ivanhoe*.

The Maryland State Constitution of 1776 had decreed that "all persons professing the Christian religion, are equally entitled to protection of their religious liberty," and it declared that "no other test or qualification ought to be required, on admission to any office of trust or profit, than such oath of support and fidelity to this State . . . and a declaration of a belief in the Christian religion."<sup>126</sup> The 1776 decree was not necessarily targeted solely or specifically at Jews, since at that time there were very few Jews residing in the state.<sup>127</sup> Despite the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, however, this edict remained in effect, precluding Jews from serving in public office or on juries. As Joseph Blau and Slao Baron note, Maryland Jews lodged continual complaints against the law. Those complainants included Baltimore's Solomon Etting, son of a prominent Jewish family, who filed a series of annual petitions to repeal the law beginning in 1797.<sup>128</sup> Official efforts to overturn the edict had begun in 1801, and after an 1801 defeat, the effort was repeated in 1804, when they were again shot down.<sup>129</sup> In 1818, Thomas Kennedy, "a devoted follower of Jeffersonian principles," renewed the petition for Jewish rights, crafting what would become known as the Maryland "Jew Bill."<sup>130</sup>

Soon after Kennedy initiated his petition, Jacob I. Cohen of Baltimore contacted his friend Ebenezer Thomas (a member of the committee appointed to review the petition), observing that "in times of peril and war, the Jews have borne the privations incident to such times, and their best exertions have been given to their utmost, in defense of a common cause. See the Israelite in the ranks of danger, exposing his life in the defense of his

Country of adoption or of his nativity." Cohen added that Jews had gladly risked their lives as soldiers in American wars, but that Maryland, "the State under whose banners he has fought and bled," forbade his promotion to the rank of officer.<sup>131</sup> Cohen's letter invokes traditionally masculine prerogatives (serving in the military and on juries) as integral to Jews' full acceptance into American culture.

The committee reviewing Kennedy's petition reported that "it is surely inconsistent, it is surely strange, that a Jew who may hold a seat in Congress, who may even be raised to the highest and most honorable station in the universe . . . cannot hold any office of profit or trust under the constitution of Maryland."<sup>132</sup> The committee's best efforts notwithstanding, the bill was defeated by a vote of 50-24. The *Maryland Censor* exclaimed in disgust, "how contemptible must we appear in the eyes of our more enlightened sister states! Who shall boast that the age of fanaticism has passed!"<sup>133</sup> Newspapers in other cities decried the rejection of the bill as "disgraceful," wondering whether Maryland would soon begin distinguishing among Christian sects and deciding which were the "true" Christians. Some mourned that such "illiberal principles" should be expressed in a nation that claimed to be "the asylum of the oppressed." Others labeled it a "reproach to our country."<sup>134</sup> In New York, Mordecai Noah published not only his own response to the decision, but letters from Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and James Madison in defense of Jewish rights.

Opponents of the bill claimed that "Jews had rights enough," that Maryland was "a Christian state, and that it did not comport with due respect for the Christian religion to permit Jews, Turks, and Infidels to participate in all the civil rights of Christians."<sup>135</sup> The debate over the bill raged for years and divided political parties. As the *New England Galaxy* reported in 1823, Washington County, Maryland, voting tickets were headed "Jew bill ticket" and "No Jew bill ticket."<sup>136</sup> On January 5, 1826—almost thirty years after the first petitions—the Maryland "Jew Bill" finally passed the Maryland House of Delegates by a vote of 45-32, bringing political equality to the state's Jewish citizens. A few months later, Solomon Etting and Jacob Cohen were elected to the Baltimore City Council.<sup>137</sup> Returning to the objections against *Ivanhoe*, small wonder that those who campaigned so fiercely for Jewish rights would have opposed what they regarded as a demeaning representation of Jews on the national stage. For them, Isaac represented those "Hebraisms" that set Jews apart from their fellow citizens and recalled their history of oppression.

By the closing years of the 1820s, Jewish American men had scored significant legal victories in their campaigns to secure equal rights, and the ascension of a more democratic national government had helped to level the playing field in multiple arenas. But forward progress was marred by movements such as the Society for Ameliorating the Condition of the Jews, which focused on converting Jews to Christianity or resettling them in the western territories. At the same time, the advent of new, more aggressive performance styles in politics, popular culture, and playhouses licensed displays of more explicitly “masculine” conduct centered on themes of violence and honor. The next generation of Jewish playwrights, as well as Jewish and Gentile audiences, would struggle to translate familiar Jewish stereotypes of weak fathers, venal moneylenders, and ludicrous lovers into this new model. Could the stage expand its repertoire of Jewish characters and persuade audiences that new, more dynamic models were acceptable and realistic representations of Jewish masculinity?

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Blood and Sacrifice*

#### Jewish Citizenship, Masculinity, and Violence, 1826–1861

Where is the land on which our fathers and our fathers' fathers rested?

—GEORGE WASHINGTON HARBY, *TUTOONA, OR THE INDIAN GIRL* (1835)

The crowd in the courtroom burst forth into one roar of approbation.

—FROM THE MURDER TRIAL OF GEORGE WASHINGTON HARBY (1858)

The end of the eighteenth century had witnessed a revival of classical republicanism on the American stage as European dramas such as *Cato* and *Gustavus Vasa* were repurposed to model masculine ideals for national audiences.<sup>1</sup> Plays of patriotic sacrifice often included ritual combat as a means of demonstrating masculinity. The late 1820s and 1830s saw another resurgence of classical motifs, but stripped of the gentility that had buffered earlier generations. As Matthew Rebirthorn describes it, the “grammar of the passions” had metamorphosed into “passionate exclamation” and a “‘thunder and lightning’ construction of American identity.”<sup>2</sup> This chapter juxtaposes a host of those passionate new characters alongside a number of violent episodes—such as personal duels of honor, the forcible removal of native peoples, and the massacre of Jews in Damascus—to examine the role of violence in negotiating the bonds and boundaries of Jewish masculine identity. There were a range of masculine images that Jewish playwrights presented on the national stage in the Jacksonian era, from austere Roman soldiers to commanding Native warriors. Featuring Roman military characters aligned Jewish American authors with the values of classical republicanism and the masculine prerogatives of citizenship so central to the new nation. Incorporating Native American characters created patriotic avatars combating imperial and ethnic oppression. In the hands of a Jewish author, the Native American character might also assume the potential for a double-coded

reading. He could simultaneously embody the virtues debarred to the stage Jew while also signifying the Jew's alienation and oppression. While this chapter examines the ways in which Jewish American playwrights struggled to create viable masculine role models, it also hinges on five violent confrontations between Jewish men and their Gentile opponents that help to illustrate the barriers they faced in this process. Four of these confrontations involved real-life combat and the fifth was a fictional showdown based on an actual event. Each participant enacted a spectacle of masculine prerogative where the Jewish identity of one of the combatants played a central role in the furor. These episodes set the stage for a larger discussion of how Jewish American masculinity was represented and interpreted on stage and in the public sphere in the four decades leading up to the Civil War. If chapter 1 explored the legal means through which Jewish Americans sought to redress their grievances in the new nation, chapter 2 examines extra-legal and often violent strategies employed in defining masculine honor. Images of duels, uprisings, and physical combat dominated the American stage, popular fiction, politics, and the national imagination in the years between Andrew Jackson's election and the outbreak of the Civil War. Exploring how Jewish playwrights, performers, and citizens invoked violence or actions beyond the law illuminates their efforts to assert more masculine images on the dramatic *and* the public stage.

By the 1820s, the stage had yet to provide viable models of Jewish men successfully assimilating into Anglo-American culture or performing in the style of one of the new frontier heroes. The theme of cowardice in connection with representations of Jewish masculinity took precedence in the familiar dramatic repertoire. Shylock bears insults from Christians, which, while it may have been a strategic choice, was also viewed as a cowardly one. Cumberland's Sheva and Dibdin's Abednego both refuse to fight in defense of their honor, and while each character invokes pacifism as his excuse, each also lays himself open to suspicions of weakness. In a supremely cowardly move, Rowson's Ben Hassan dresses as a woman to escape an impending battle, and as Mordecai Noah's plays and earlier struggles over the Maryland "Jew Bill" suggest, Jewish American men often wrestled with establishing basic credibility and a sense of belonging. When would they be American *enough*? When would their Jewish heritage become simply another innocuous fact about them?<sup>23</sup> Similar issues surfaced in ritual performances of masculine identity beyond the playhouse, as Jewish American men took part in a series of public demonstrations of traditionally masculine behaviors calcu-

lated to defend their honor and to demonstrate their right to participate in a (fictive) fraternity of American brotherhood.

The election of Andrew Jackson in 1828 represented the triumph of a more aggressive masculinity over antiquated models embodied by defeated incumbent John Quincy Adams. The turbulent state of the nation—which had faced economic depression at the end of the 1820s, the 1830s showdown over the Second Bank of the United States, and the rapid expansion of manufacturing and transportation into previously rural and frontier territories—threatened to destabilize the image of the peaceful yeoman farmer that had proved such a resonant symbol of American national identity. Much has been made of the advent of frontier figures (real or fictional) such as Davy Crockett or Nimrod Wildfire that emerged as hybrids of rustic virtue and colorful savagery.<sup>4</sup> New heroes peopling the stage and American popular culture engaged in bouts of hand-to-hand combat that presented fictional parallels to more abstract political and economic duels fought in the Senate, such as those waged over the rechartering of the Second Bank of the United States.

The career of star performer Edwin Forrest offers an excellent example of how masculine honor became identified with signature roles in nineteenth-century theatre. Forrest helped to show American men how masculinity could be established in spite of seeming contradictions, with the successful performance of masculine honor trumping all other considerations. His most successful characters—Jack Cade, *Metamora*, *Spartacus*—all struggled with dualities and a sense of marginalization: Cade was an exile, *Spartacus* a slave, and *Metamora* a Native American. Peter Reed has argued that although Forrest appealed primarily to white, working-class audiences, there was room in his expansive performance of masculinity to encompass a diverse array of socioeconomic and racial identities.<sup>5</sup> As capacious as Forrest's robustly male characters may have been, could they encompass Jewish identities as well? Even if Forrest made the performance of dual identities acceptable in a hero, did this leave a place in the new lexicon of American characters for a *Jewish* role model?

### "A DAMNED JEW"

I begin with two duels: one that degenerated into farce and another that escalated into tragedy. In 1824, Mordecai Noah had launched a new newspa-




per, the *New York National Advocate* (he had been ousted from his previous position as editor of the *National Advocate*). Unfortunately for Noah, his partner, Elijah J. Roberts, speculated with the paper's capital (according to Sarna, he lost it to swindlers), the new venture collapsed, and their partnership dissolved.<sup>6</sup> As Sarna notes, Roberts tried to recruit support to keep the paper going on his own by launching anti-Jewish attacks against Noah, claiming that "The Jews too have deserted us—well, they crucified our Saviour which was a much greater sin."<sup>7</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, relations between the two men became acrimonious, with each leveling periodic printed attacks against the other.

On June 20, 1828, two years after the failure of the *National Advocate*, Roberts ambushed Noah with a whip on the steps of the Park Theatre. The incident received intense public attention. A handbill, circulated soon after the attack, shows Noah in front of the Park playhouse being beaten by Roberts. The image (apparently published by Noah's detractors) depicts a caricatured version of Noah with an exaggerated nose. It also features a theatre poster between the two men, ostensibly listing the evening's performances. Tellingly, the plays are "THE JEW, 1 Act of the HYPOCRITE, End with the farce of THE LIAR."<sup>8</sup> The image shows a frightened-looking Noah trying to escape from Roberts rather than fighting back. The location (the Park Theatre) obviously recalled Noah's work as playwright and critic, and it signaled an anti-Jewish attack through plays already familiar to New York audiences. The handbill indicts not only Noah's courage, but his pretensions as a dramatic author and critic. It also serves as a reminder that plays continued to be used (in practice or in the abstract) to shape images of Jews in the public sphere (fig. 2).

Noah brought suit against Roberts, and during a dramatic trial—covered at length in newspapers throughout the North—he accused Roberts of cheating him, impugning his character, conspiring with his enemies, and even embezzling funds from the paper to manage a troupe of traveling players in Albany. Eyewitness reports claimed variously that Roberts had crept up behind Noah and struck him "two or three times" and that Noah had stumbled into the theatre, or that Noah had not stumbled but had fallen under the blows and that bystanders had pulled Roberts off him. Some asserted that Noah had fought back. Noah received a "gash" over his eye (though witnesses disagreed whether this resulted from Roberts's blows or when Noah fell and hit his head trying to avoid them).

Noah also used the trial to air his grievances against James G. Brooks,

**CITY OF NEW-YORK ---SS.**



**MORDECAI M. NOAH,**  
Of No. 57, Franklin-street, being  
**DULY SWORN,**  
*DEPOSETH and SAITH, that on the 20th day of*  
*June 1828, at the 2d Ward of the City of New-York,*  
*he was violently assaulted, by*  
**ELIJAH J. ROBERTS,**  
*Who attacked him on the steps, and*  
**COW-SKINNED HIM!!**  
*without any just justification on the part of the said assailant, where-*  
*fore this deponent prays, that the said*  
**ELIJAH J. ROBERTS,**  
*may be bound by recognizance to be of good behaviour and keep*  
*the peace, and to answer for the above assault, &c. at the*  
*next Court of General Sessions of the Peace, to*  
*be holden in and for the said city.*  
*Sworn before me this*  
*20th day of June.*  
**J. HOPSON.**

**M. M. NOAH.**

Fig. 2. Handbill showing attack on Mordecai Noah by Elijah Roberts outside the Park Street Theatre. (Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-40912.)

an employee of a rival newspaper, the *Morning Courier*, who knew of Roberts's intended attack beforehand and chose not to warn Noah, and who also published an account of Noah "rushing away" in a "dastardly, cowardly manner," even though he had not been an eyewitness to the attack. During the trial, Brooks was called as a witness. Noah questioned why Brooks had not thought it his duty to warn "a respectable individual" (Noah) about the

ambush. Brooks riposted, "I take the liberty to give my own definition of the word respectable, and in your case, I don't think the epithet applies." The *Courier* challenged Noah's bravery and his knowledge of the "*Code Militaire*," claiming that although Noah was popularly known as *Major Noah*, "our ideas of honor must have been acquired in different schools."<sup>9</sup> Noah called other newspaper editors who worked with Brooks as witnesses, accusing them of countenancing Brooks's published attacks on Noah. They responded that they had not been involved in the attacks but that they would have felt justified printing any statements impugning Noah's honor and veracity.

Although a jury found Roberts guilty of assault, the trial rapidly disintegrated into an open forum on *Noah's* character rather than on that of his assailant. While party politics played an important role in the courtroom theatrics, Noah's Jewish identity seems to have ghosted the trial, whether in accusations of his dishonesty; his cowardice; his ignorance of the way "gentlemen" conducted themselves in affairs of honor; or in the handbills that had been plastered across the city, showing Noah standing in front of a theatre with play titles that pointed to him as a "Jew," a "Hypocrite," and a "Liar."

The Noah-Roberts fracas drew attention to Noah's perceived failure to perform according to expected codes of masculine conduct (as the image of him cowering on the Park Theatre steps suggests). Just a few years later in 1832, the "Minis Affair"—a debacle that began with an anti-Semitic insult and ended in a death—would offer yet another striking example of how performances of Jewish male identity were enacted in the public sphere and how codes of masculine conduct, religious faith, and "American-ness" became intertwined in the public imagination.<sup>10</sup> Unfolding in Savannah, Georgia, among one of the nation's oldest Jewish communities, this showdown between Dr. Phillip Minis and James Stark reminded the Savannah community that ritual performances of masculine identity and belonging would have to be staged among each generation, and that Jewish American masculinity was not firmly established in the Gentile imagination. The time-honored tradition of dueling enacted in the Minis-Stark affair offers an opportunity to analyze how each participant construed the other's identity and sought to outperform his rival on the public stage of masculine honor.

During the Minis-Stark affair, attacks were leveled against one of Georgia's oldest, most well-respected Jewish families. Like Noah's character of Jas-

per (in *She Would Be a Soldier*), long-standing settlement and patriotic service apparently did not automatically confer permanent insider status. As Jacob Rader Marcus remarks, "one might think that antiquity of settlement [would be] a defense against Judeo-phobic aspersions, especially against the denunciation of the Jew as an alien." As he points out, however, "the Minis affair proves that even pioneer Jews—'Founding Fathers,' as it were, are not spared."

On August 10, 1832, Dr. Philip Minis of Savannah, Georgia, a descendant of one of the most established Jewish families in the state, shot and killed James Jones Stark.<sup>11</sup> The enmity between the two men began some time before their fateful, final encounter. According to Dr. Richard Arnold's diary account, one night, "when Minis was not present, [Stark] without any provocation, cursed Minis for a 'damned Jew' and a 'damned Israelite,' saying 'he ought to be pissed upon,' and 'he was not worth the powder and lead it would take to kill him.'"<sup>12</sup> Minis's sister, Sally, gave a slightly different account of the disagreement's origins. Apparently, Stark's anti-Jewish slurs started earlier that same day when Minis was discussing an upcoming horse race and wondering aloud about what to name a horse. According to Sally Minis, Stark, who happened to be nearby, remarked sarcastically that Minis should "name him Shylock." The insults escalated later that evening at Mr. Luddington's tavern, with Stark making the "damned Jew" comments that were then reported to Minis.<sup>13</sup> Minis's friends apparently ran from Luddington's to fetch him, but when Minis arrived at the bar room, Stark behaved civilly to him and the incident seemed to blow over. Acquaintances of both men, however, continued to stir trouble, spreading rumors that Minis had demanded retribution or that Stark had made a full apology. These rumors persisted through July, prompting Minis to demand "that satisfaction which one gentleman should afford another."<sup>14</sup>

Stark accepted, but he set the time of the duel for the end of that same day and demanded that rifles, rather than pistols, be used.<sup>15</sup> Minis protested that his rifle was at the gunsmith's and suggested postponement until the following day, a request denied by Stark and his second. Instead, Stark and his second proceeded to the appointed location, where they "made a flourish, shot rifles, etc. and returned to town flushed with victory over the affair."<sup>16</sup> Upon their return rumors circulated once more, with some alleging that Minis had mistaken the time of the duel and others claiming that he was a coward and had avoided the fight altogether. The two men later encountered each other on the street, and Arnold's diary records the extreme tension:

At Dures Corner, Wayne and Stark met them, they coming from Bull St., going down the bay. Minis faced them as they passed, and stopped at the corner; when W. and Stark passed, Stark with a very threatening aspect, and had got just about the edge of the pavement of the brick building, I heard Stark say, "Let me go back and whip that damned rascal," or words to that effect. Wayne opposed him and detained him for half a minute, but Stark would go back. When he was fairly on his way back, I anticipated a fight, for I knew that Stark was generally in the habit of carrying one of these large Spanish knives. Minis stood his ground and faced them as they passed, maintaining a nonchalant [air]. . . . I went up to Minis, I being very apprehensive that an attack would be made upon Minis. A. Cohen joined a few minutes afterwards, and we all walked together to Minis' office. While there, Col. M. and Spalding joined us, and I observed that after what had happened, Minis was a cursed fool if he did not go armed.<sup>17</sup>

Although Stark violated proper dueling etiquette by setting a time impossible for his opponent to meet and by his unconventional choice of weapon, gossip and accusations against Minis flew throughout the city.<sup>18</sup> As Arnold reported, "I have heard it said that Minis was openly laughed at, as a coward, by Stark's bodyguards." Minis was advised to "show himself in public and not keep out of sight, as if the atrocious calumnies circulated about him had any foundation," so one afternoon he and a friend went to the bar room of the City Hotel.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, a friend of Stark's was also there, and he fetched Stark, who was upstairs. When Stark came down, Minis declared, "I pronounce James Jones Stark a coward." After that point, confusion reigned. Some witnesses claimed that Stark put his hand in his pocket as if to draw a weapon and began to advance on Minis. Some asserted that Stark had already drawn a pistol when Minis fired on him, while other bystanders claimed that Stark had no weapon. Regardless, Minis's shot hit Stark in the chest, killing him almost instantly.

Trying the case presented numerous challenges to Savannah's citizens. As the *Savannah Georgian* noted, "both parties are extensively connected in this city."<sup>20</sup> Minis's family could be traced back to the origins of the Georgia colony, and Stark was a member of the Glynn County legislature and a member of the Savannah Volunteer Guards (who interred him with military honors). While fellow Georgian Robert Habersham admitted that Stark had been "a dissipated young man," he also claimed that he was "brave,

honorable, and promising in his profession.”<sup>21</sup> Habersham blamed Minis for the affair, though he expressed his pity for Minis’s family. The court eventually acquitted Minis of murder on January 23, 1833, but without the same sense of vindication that often accompanied these kinds of trials. He ultimately left Savannah and married into the prominent Livingston family in New York. He rose to the rank of major in the army and also worked as the “Disbursing Agent of the Indian Department” until 1837.<sup>22</sup>

From the distance of time and the lapse of custom, the Minis-Stark affair may seem no more than a collection of ill-judged incidents. Certainly neither man need have pursued their quarrel to the death. Yet both became caught up in ritual performances of masculinity that drove them to a tragic conclusion. Bertram Wyatt-Brown has described the nineteenth-century American practice of dueling as “a means to create and bind together a privileged group and to classify the ranks of its members for the purposes of establishing order and group cohesion.”<sup>23</sup> Wyatt-Brown also contends that “the conferring of honor or the denying of it becomes a form of dramatization—a staging before a responsive audience.”<sup>24</sup> In the Minis-Stark incident, this audience was composed not of only the combatants and their seconds, but a wider community: “Seldom truly private in a climate of a democratic public, duels involved sometimes scores of observers and intriguers, most of whom belonged to a tight little circle of males, usually politicians.”<sup>25</sup> Had Minis swallowed Stark’s insults he would have been branded a coward among his social circle, and he would have acceded implicitly to Stark’s anti-Jewish attacks by accepting the epithet of “damned Jew.” Yet, as Matthew Rebirth suggests, by killing Stark (rather than simply wounding him), Minis may have undermined the very code of elite masculine honor he was trying to uphold.<sup>26</sup> Successfully wounding Stark in a formal duel witnessed by his social cohort would have re-established his status in the community. Shooting a potentially unarmed man in a public bar reduced the performance to little more than a brawl and Minis’s interpretation of masculinity to something criminal. I argue that Minis’s killing of Stark was an unsuccessful performance of masculine prerogative. Rather than vindicating his reputation, his behavior played into the same Jewish stereotypes that Stark had invoked in the slurs that sparked the original confrontation.

The Minis-Stark debacle raises the question of what *unsuccessful* performances of Jewish masculine prerogative might teach scholars. How did this duel and its unsatisfactory outcome connect back to the nation’s theatrical culture? The episode presents a collision of the historical and the contempo-



rary in this performance, and it echoes in other episodes enacted on and off the American stage. How Jewish American men might reconcile the robust, almost pugnacious masculinity of the Jacksonian era with classical models of male conduct and their own religious and ethnic identities would remain a troubling question in the years to come.

“A MAN, A POET, A SCHOLAR”: JONAS B. PHILLIPS  
AND THE JEWISH AVATAR

Beginning in the 1820s, Jewish playwright Jonas B. Phillips synthesized new masculine role models popularized by Forrest and his contemporaries with the classical legacies of Washington and Lafayette. While Mordecai Noah may have created potentially double-coded characters whose Jewish identities could be inferred by audiences familiar with Noah's personal history, Phillips created a series of Jewish “avatars,” characters who became embodiments of Jewish-republican virtues even though they were represented as ancient Romans or Native Americans.<sup>27</sup> Phillips himself modeled a more genteel masculinity than some of his counterparts described above. On May 24, 1867, when the *Jewish Messenger* marked Phillips's passing, they mourned: “An Israelite—a man, a poet, a scholar, a courtly gentleman, and a gifted barrister—died when Jonas B. Phillips ceased to breathe this mortal life. . . . Scarcely a night but a play of his rejoiced the audiences of one of our theatres; scarcely a week but some signal triumph greeted him in one of our courts.”<sup>28</sup> Phillips authored dozens of dramas, poems, stories, songs, and theatrical prologues. He also belonged to a talented family of playwrights, theatre managers, and performers, which included Aaron J. Phillips, Mordecai Noah, Moses “Nosey” Phillips, and Henry B. Phillips.<sup>29</sup>

Born in 1805, Phillips's work began appearing on stage when he was only nineteen years old, coinciding with the Marquis de Lafayette's triumphant return to the United States. From 1824 to 1825, theatres throughout the nation offered lavish celebrations to welcome Lafayette. One of the songs Phillips wrote in Lafayette's honor gushed: “Like an angel he came / And immortal his name / Shall forever appear on the records of fame; / And the sun of our glory in darkness shall set; / When we cease to honor the brave La Fayette.”<sup>30</sup> By age twenty-two Phillips had published *Tales for Leisure Hours*, a collection of short stories.<sup>31</sup> On November 25, 1830, when Phillips was twenty-five, the well-known actress Mrs. Hamblin recited one of his

odes in honor of the French Revolution: "Long may the banners of both nations wave, / In proud alliance over land and sea; / And teach the world, the virtuous and brave, / Alike are mighty, and alike ARE FREE."<sup>32</sup>

Some scholars have remarked that Phillips never created an openly Jewish character in his plays or poems, with the exception of one character that appears for a single scene. Themes of masculine identity and father-child relationships that resonate throughout his work, however, mirror struggles of a rising generation of Jewish American men coming into their own after the Revolution and the War of 1812. Although Phillips was not born at the time of the American Revolution and was too young to fight during the War of 1812, he clearly embraced the patriotic spirit of the young country, a spirit perhaps inculcated by his grandfather (Jonas Phillips) and his uncle (Naph-tali Phillips, Tammany Democrat and one-time owner of the *National Advocate*).<sup>33</sup> He linked that spirit to the classical models that dominated the post-Revolutionary period and that had been resurrected by playwrights such as Robert Montgomery Bird, John Howard Payne, John Augustus Stone, and Robert T. Conrad (among others). Louis Harap has observed that like other early nineteenth-century American dramatists, Phillips often drew inspiration from European source materials that he labored to cleanse from the taint of Old World corruption and infuse with a more distinctly patriotic American spirit. For example, Harap points to two of Phillips's plays. The first, a popular 1831 melodrama called *The Evil Eye*,<sup>34</sup> is based on a British short story of the same name that tells a story of Greek emancipation.<sup>35</sup> The second is the 1833 tragedy *Camillus, or the Self-Exiled Patriot* (based on *Coriolanus*), which offers an excellent example of Phillips's Jewish-republican avatar in action and of a character pushed beyond the formal bounds of law and society to take up arms in a morally just cause.<sup>36</sup> There is nothing inherently "Jewish" about the character of Camillus (or indeed any of the other characters in the drama). And in hewing to the models established by his contemporaries and his eighteenth-century predecessors, Phillips envisions a quintessential republican realm in which issues of *moral* rather than religious difference delineate truly honorable masculine conduct.

*Camillus* tells the story of a Roman father whose disgust with his fellow citizens cause him to leave the city and disavow his ties to Rome and his responsibilities. When the Gauls attack, the government realizes its mistake in alienating so proud a patriot. They beg Camillus to return and fight. He does so, declaring, "We will deliver Rome with *steel* not *gold* [emphasis in original]."<sup>37</sup> Camillus's patriotic rhetoric must have reminded American au-



CLAYTON'S EDITION.

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# THE EVIL EYE:

**A MELO-DRAMA,**

*In Two Acts.*

WRITTEN BY

**JONAS B. PHILLIPS,**

*Author of Paul Clifford, Ten Years of a Seaman's Life,  
&c. &c.*

---

PRINTED FROM THE ACTING COPY.

To which are added,

THE CAST OF THE CHARACTERS, ENTRANCES AND  
EXITS, RELATIVE POSITION OF THE PERFORM-  
ERS ON THE STAGE, AND THE WHOLE OF  
THE STAGE BUSINESS.

As performed at the

**BOWERY THEATRE, NEW-YORK.**

*(First Performed April 4, 1831.)*

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**New-York:**

**PUBLISHED BY E. B. CLAYTON,**

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And C. NEAL, No. 201 Chestnut-street, Philadelphia.

1831.

Fig. 3. Title page for *The Evil Eye* by Jonas B. Phillips. (Collection of Princeton University Library, Leonard L. Milberg Collection of Jewish American Writers.)

diences of other Jacksonian-era stage heroes such as Spartacus in *The Gladiator* or Jack Cade. Like them, Camillus shared not only a passionate devotion to his country, but also to his family. In Camillus's case he has a beloved daughter, Camilla, who is threatened by the treacherous Lucius Apelus. Although Camillus rallies the Roman troops, he cannot save his daughter, and she succumbs to plague. In a dramatic final scene, she enters, driven mad by fever, begging her father to let her see her mother's grave. She collapses and dies, and just as Camillus is on the verge of death beside her, Lucius Apelus is dragged before him. As a last act of vengeance, Camillus stabs Lucius to death before he "falls dead on the body of Camilla."<sup>38</sup>

*Camillus* opened at Philadelphia's Arch Street Theatre on February 8, 1833, where critics described its reception as "deservedly favorable."<sup>39</sup> Philadelphia audience member Joseph Sill observed in his diary that "the chief plot of the play turns upon his self-banishment from Rome and upon his succeeding triumphs."<sup>40</sup> In the preface to the 1833 edition of the play, Phillips noted: "One . . . fact I mention with pride, and which, perhaps, an author has seldom had an opportunity of noticing, is, that my tragedy, an American production was performed, and well performed by AMERICAN ACTORS" (emphasis in original).<sup>41</sup> The play soon moved to New York, and while the *New-York Mirror* remarked on Camillus's "strong family likeness" to Coriolanus, it was still heralded as a "patriotic" drama that would stand the test against any modern author.<sup>42</sup> Camillus might also have struck the audience as a familiar, republican father.

Doubtless many of Phillips's other poems and short stories would have sounded similar chords of recognition among his readers. And his tale "The Foundling Maid" invoked the device of the surrogate parent relationship in which a child is found to have mysteriously meaningful antecedents. Phillips's use of this narrative device in *The Foundling Maid* offers an intriguing twist on the surrogate father narrative and might even suggest a "riff" on the story arc of Jewish men rearing Christian children, only to relinquish them when their real parent(s) or Gentile suitors appeared to claim them.<sup>43</sup> The story was originally published in 1826 under Phillips's pen name, Alcanzor.<sup>44</sup> Set in the colonial period, *The Foundling Maid* is about an Indian named Niagara who discovers a baby girl lying next to the frozen body of her mother. He brings the baby to a nearby inn and asks the owners (a Major and Mrs. Copeland) to care for her, vowing to visit her every day, which he does. When she reaches age four, Niagara claims the girl, named Maria, to rear as his own. According to the story, Maria was "educated without sophistry, taught to adore in the simplicity of

nature the great Author of all," whom Niagara refers to as "The Great Spirit." She eventually marries a man named Arthur Evans in a ceremony performed by Niagara, who joins the pair's hands "under a starry canopy" and gives his daughter a final blessing before sinking down and dying.<sup>45</sup> After Niagara's death, war breaks out and Arthur joins the American cause in the revolution against Britain. One day, he happens upon an elderly British soldier named Charles Granville, who turns out to be Maria's long-lost father. Many years before Granville had driven his wife and infant child away because he was convinced that his wife was having an affair with a fellow officer. After learning the fate of his long-lost child and seeing her happily married, Granville too slips into the grave. At the conclusion of the story, the author notes that Maria and Arthur teach their children to revere not only Niagara, but Granville and the Copelands as well.

Maria serves a symbolic role in the story. She is a young woman raised by a Native American man who is taught to revere a "Great Spirit" rather than an explicitly Christian deity, and she is married outside the church. She creates a "blended" family that includes multiple parental figures with each equally honored and none given preference because of nationality or religious faith. I argue that Maria could be interpreted as a double-coded character by Phillips and a Jewish readership. She is a wanderer, cast away from her home and embraced by settlers in a new land. She grows up in harmony with that new land, rambling over mountains and fields, at one with nature. Maria represents a new generation of American children who will (hopefully) neither experience nor mete out the prejudices of their ancestors. The masculine-driven violence connected to her story remains largely in the past or outside the main scene of action. Her calming feminine presence brings out the gentleness in the male characters around her.<sup>46</sup>

While *The Foundling Maid* owes a debt to *A Winter's Tale*, it is also reminiscent of the story arcs found in *The Jew, or the Benevolent Hebrew* and *The Jew and Doctor*, where long-lost children are reared by kindly "outsiders" and later redeemed by their own people. Phillips, however, rendered the story in an American idiom by setting it around the time of the American Revolution, and he also drew on a character that would have been resonant for both Gentile and Jewish audiences: the Native American. The character of Niagara rebuts Anglo-American claims of Indian cruelty and selfishness. Not only does he rescue Maria, he devotes his life to educating and protecting her. It is Niagara, more than any other character in the play, that makes the abandoned daughter of a British soldier a truly "American" child.

Phillips's choice to use a Native American character was certainly typi-

cal of the period. Much has been written of nineteenth-century Americans' cultural fascination with the Native American.<sup>47</sup> Early national plays such as *The Indian Princess* (1808) integrated native characters to forecast a bright future for American settlers removed from the corruption of European society. This trend continued throughout the first half of the 1800s with works ranging from James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* to John Augustus Stone's stage hit *Metamora; or, the Last of the Wampagoags*. As Rebhorn notes, "Starting just after Andrew Jackson entered the Oval Office and just before the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the American theatre turned to the Native American because of its desire for an aesthetic that was truly 'American'. . . . The noble savage . . . became the central character in a spate of plays that dominated the scene from 1829 to 1845."<sup>48</sup> The gradual eradication of Native American communities allowed the Indian figure to serve a dual role in Anglo-American society. The native character offered both a reminder of the pure and unspoiled qualities inherent in the New World landscape and proof of the inevitable civilizing process enabled by the spread of Western culture.<sup>49</sup>

Some nineteenth-century Jewish and Jewish-descended authors such as Mordecai Noah and John Howard Payne speculated on the connections between Jews and Native Americans (including whether native peoples represented one of the lost tribes of Israel). As Jonathan Sarna observes, these theories had begun circulating in the sixteenth century and were often focused on the question of whether the New World was in fact "God's new Israel."<sup>50</sup> Like stage Jews, stage Indians offered useful templates for inscribing a range of messages about religious, ethnic, or national identity. Noah, for example, deployed native figures in his plays and in his patriotic plans for his fellow Jewish Americans. His Indian character in *She Would Be a Soldier* offers what Rubenstein calls some of the "play's most 'authentic' expressions of nationalist, democratic, and revolutionary feeling," and theatre audiences and critics labeled the play's native character as "heroic."<sup>51</sup> When Noah spoke at the 1825 dedication of Ararat (the Jewish settlement he established in upstate New York), he detailed the parallels between Jewish and Native American culture.<sup>52</sup> In 1837, he penned the *Discourse on the Evidences of the American Indians Being the Descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel*, a treatise that summarized previous scholarship on the topic and "praised Indians as virtuous and noble."<sup>53</sup> Perhaps it is not surprising that Noah, devoted member of the Tammany Society (a democratic association named in honor of a Native American chief, Tamanend), would associate Indians with symbolic representations of American freedom.

Noah may have been honoring the “aesthetic” Indian (as Joseph Roach terms it) more than the real native peoples of North America, but his fellow playwright John Howard Payne emerged as a staunch defender of Indian rights.<sup>54</sup> Returning to the United States after a twenty-year sojourn in England, Payne had become acquainted with Cherokee leader John Ross in the 1830s. When Payne spoke out against American Indian removal policies and what he perceived as a government cover-up of the brutal events that followed along the Trail of Tears, he was jailed by the Georgia militia. In an 1836 letter to his friend General Edward Harden, he commented, “No doubt the Seminole outbreak will be urged to promote the Cherokee ruin, and the most virtuous nation in the world hear no more of the affair till it is announced in thunder at the great Judgment seat of Eternal Retribution. . . . I hope you will escape what I was made to suffer. The upper part of Georgia has much to atone for already and seems to be in a condition which cannot fail to bring on her much more.”<sup>55</sup> Payne added that he planned to travel to Washington, DC, where he imagined that “various politicians” would try to draw him into some “scrape” or other, observing with scorn that “the government agents seem to have been busy muzzling the press in our leading cities, in relation to my case,—especially here where the statement I made has been systematically suppressed.” Payne’s “statement” had been strongly in favor of Native American rights, and his newspaper articles and attempts to launch his own publications about the issue had been censored as well. Payne ended his letter to Harden with a request that his friend send him whatever he could locate on the history of Indian peoples, and he later authored a ten-volume study that reflected both his research and his own personal experiences among native peoples.<sup>56</sup>

Ultimately, whether or not Noah, Phillips, and Payne imagined Native Americans as distant kith and kin to the Jews, they conjured a useful bond of common exile and persecution. As figures betrayed by “white” laws and often operating outside the bounds of Christian understanding, Native characters in dramas or short stories also endured the same biases as their real-life Jewish counterparts and were compelled to defend themselves by force when legal measures failed to return justice.

#### “CALUMNIES AGAINST OUR NATION”

Up until this point I have focused on efforts by Jewish American playwrights to create male role models that pushed back against popular stereotypes of

Jews as criminals, cowards, and traitors. I have suggested that Jewish American authors conjured spectacles of violence primarily to redress grievances beyond the reach of the law, and I have pointed to both successful and unsuccessful challenges to dominant paradigms of Gentile masculinity.<sup>57</sup> But it is too facile to claim that Jewish American playwrights wrote only heroic Jewish-coded characters. Some playwrights engaged in subtle acts of resistance by reframing Jewish stereotypes on their own terms. Thus I turn now to what seems a puzzling break in a larger pattern of recuperation and restoration: Jonas B. Phillips's choice to include a murderous Jewish criminal in his 1839 stage adaptation of the well-known British tale *Jack Sheppard, or the Life of a Robber*.

Phillips's dramatic adaptation was one of many based on Harrison Ainsworth's popular novel *Jack Sheppard*. Ainsworth tells the story of "thief-taker" Jonathan Wild and his vendetta against the romantic criminal Jack Sheppard.<sup>58</sup> Ainsworth's novel (originally serialized in 1839) features a Jewish villain named Abraham (or "Nab") Mendez. Throughout the story Mendez is described as a "dwarfish Jew" and a "coward."<sup>59</sup> He speaks with a "traditional" Jewish dialect (an exaggerated German dialect that was often used even when representing Sephardic Jews, which the name "Mendez" would suggest). While Mendez has a substantial role in Ainsworth's novel, in Phillips's dramatic adaptation Mendez appears in only *one* scene and has less than five lines. The scene is a pivotal one, and Mendez is crucial to the plot (he helps Jonathan Wild try to murder an innocent man), thus it would have been problematic to eliminate the character entirely, particularly for those familiar with Ainsworth's story. While the choice to reduce Mendez's part *might* be interpreted as necessary in the transition from page to stage, I note that in Phillips's theatrical version Mendez's sidekick from the novel, one "Quilt" Arnold, remains a prominent part of the action, suggesting that Phillips's goal was not simply to condense the plot but rather to downplay its most flagrantly offensive character.

The cast list of the original Bowery Theatre production (which opened on December 14, 1839) does not even list Mendez as a role, suggesting that his part was too small to be noted by theatre critics and was probably played by a minor member of the Bowery company.<sup>60</sup> By contrast, other playwrights' adaptations of the Jack Sheppard story included Mendez as a prominent character.<sup>61</sup> I suggest that Phillips chose to excise—as much as possible—the negative Jewish types from a familiar story and thus to subtly reinterpret the text for American audiences.<sup>62</sup> To eliminate Mendez completely might have called undue attention to the role and raised questions about Phillips's



motives. Erasing the Jewish character might, paradoxically, have called attention to Phillips's own Jewishness. To diminish Mendez's role to a single appearance with only a handful of lines appears to be an act of defiance *and* compromise. It defies—to a certain extent—audience expectations about the visibility of the character (particularly audiences primed by Ainsworth's serialized story). It compromises because Phillips still allows the character to take the stage, complete with exaggerated accent and murderous intent.

The continued coexistence of ugly stereotypes alongside more positive and sympathetic characters demands that the scholar interrogate *why* the culture resisted sacrificing its familiar stage figures. Were those figures still useful in some way, or did they resonate with deeply held beliefs among American audiences? A violent incident that erupted in Damascus only two months after the opening of Phillips's *Jack Sheppard* and that drew international attention serves as a useful yardstick against which to measure the level of America's anti-Jewish sentiment. The episode also compelled Jewish Americans to (once again) refute claims of Jewish cowardice and defend the honor of men who bravely endured torture at the hands of their persecutors.

In February of 1840 a Christian monk disappeared in Damascus. Rumors circulated that the local Jewish community had a hand in his alleged kidnapping. A Jewish barber was flogged (more than five hundred lashes, according to various sources) until he named a group of local men he claimed had hired him to murder the priest so that the Jews could bake his blood into their Passover cakes. A group of Jewish men were rounded up and tortured in an effort to extract further confessions. According to one source, the tortures included:

1. Flogging.
2. Soaking persons in large tanks of water in their clothes.
3. The head-machine, by which the eyes are pressed out of their sockets.
4. Tying up parts of the body and ordering soldiers to twist and horribly to dispose of them into such contortions that the poor sufferers grow almost mad from pain.
5. Standing upright for three days, without being allowed any other posture, not even to lean against walls; and when they would fall down, aroused up by the by-standing sentinels with their bayonets.
6. Being dragged about in a large court by the ears until the blood gushed out.



7. Having thorns driven in between their nails and the flesh of their fingers and toes.
8. Having fires set to their beards until their faces are singed.
9. Having candles held under their noses, so that the flame arises into the nostrils.<sup>63</sup>

Five prisoners died before a group of European emissaries (including well-known Jewish philanthropist and activist Sir Moses Montefiore) were able to secure release and pardon for the remaining eight.<sup>64</sup> The case sparked outrage across Europe and the United States, and Jewish and Gentile communities alike rallied to express their disgust. American newspapers called for the president and Congress to act in support of the Damascus victims.<sup>65</sup> Jewish American communities issued public invitations for “the Israelites of Damascus to leave the land of persecution and torture, and seek an asylum here where they may enjoy their religious opinions without interference.”<sup>66</sup>

Yet the incident also ignited a series of rumors, the kind of persistent, pernicious rumors that so many Jewish communities had faced since the Middle Ages. Outlandish tales filtered in from Constantinople and elsewhere of Jews murdering Christian children for blood to sprinkle in their Passover cakes.<sup>67</sup> An article titled “The Jews of Damascus” even claimed that Jews made “triangular cakes mixed with Christian blood on the festival of Purim . . . to . . . ridicule the Trinity.”<sup>68</sup> Beginning in the 1820s, Purim and Passover celebrations had been depicted with increasing frequency on British and American stages, suggesting that playwrights imagined these rituals as among the most visible, familiar, and theatrical in the Jewish calendar. Yet the allegations against the Jews of Damascus and Constantinople also suggest that Jewish rites were still not well understood by the general Gentile populace.

In the United States, many Jewish Americans rallied to protest the Damascus Affair (as it became known). On August 27, 1840, a meeting was held at Philadelphia’s Mikveh Israel. There, Reverend Isaac Leeser spoke passionately about the stereotypes that continued to dog Jews throughout the world, proclaiming “it is not the first time that it has been said and believed that Jews are commanded to slay their Christian neighbors.”<sup>69</sup> He also responded to those who questioned why Damascus’s Jewish community had not struck back violently against their oppressors after being hauled from their homes, tortured, and falsely accused. Leeser observed that Jews

of Damascus had been too abused over the centuries to stage any effective resistance, and he chided those who criticized them for their inaction, saying, "We . . . must not, in the knowledge of our own security, despise those whom adverse fortunes have so bowed down."<sup>70</sup>

Leeser's comments about the comparative "security" of American Jews are telling. He had emigrated from Prussia in 1824 at age seventeen and had witnessed the oppression of Jewish communities outside the United States. He understood that inhabitants of a nation created by revolution, whose "tree of liberty" had been watered "by the blood of patriots and tyrants," might look askance on a community failing to take up arms in its own defense. As noted above, Jewish men were frequently accused of cowardice and submitting to insult, and they were often represented onstage as submissive.

Other defenders of the torture victims in Damascus emphatically rejected charges of cowardice. The published proceedings of the August 27 meeting at Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia quote at length the words of the chief rabbi of Damascus, who had challenged his persecutors:

When you smote me with five hundred stripes all over my body, I would not confess to a lie; when you plunged me into a pool of cold water for three hours on a winter's day, a drawn sword over my head so I could not raise it, I lied not, and when you inflicted a hundred and seventy stripes on my hand, I would not utter a falsehood; and when you drove the bones which you placed around my head into my eyes to blind me, I still lied not, and spoke not this falsehood; and now I shall sign to a lie?<sup>71</sup>

As one of the participants observed to companions at the Philadelphia gathering, "this sir, does not look much like cowardice."<sup>72</sup>

The Damascus Affair shone a spotlight on ongoing persecution facing Jewish communities. While it drew Jewish Americans together in an appreciation of the rights their United States citizenship conferred, it also served as a reminder of the need for a more global expression of solidarity. As Leeser observed, despite the protection afforded to *some* Jews who lived in countries with minimal anti-Jewish persecution:

We have no country of our own; we have no longer a united government under the shadow of which we can live securely; but we have a tie yet holier than a fatherland; a patriotism stronger than the community of one government; our tie is a sincere brotherly love, our patriotism is the affection which

unites the Israelite of one land to that of another. . . . We hail the Israelite as a brother, no matter whether his home is in the torrid zone or where the poles encircle the earth with impenetrable fetters of icy coldness.<sup>73</sup>

These themes of solidarity and the defense of Jewish families and culture echo through the final collection of plays and public performances I explore in this chapter, and I pay particular attention to the ways the Jewish father shifts from a character motivated by “the fanaticism of religious bigotry” (as with Shylock) to a champion of Jewish masculinity and defender of female virtue. Again, it is important to underscore that these emerging characters never fully dispelled their cowardly or criminal counterparts from the stage. But at least they served to complicate the dialogue.

In 1838, Anglo-Jewish playwright Charles Zachary Barnett penned *The Dream of Fate; or, Sarah the Jewess*.<sup>74</sup> The play debuted on the American stage that fall and remained in the repertoire for more than two decades, often serving as a starring vehicle for actresses playing Sarah. While I also discuss the play in chapter 4 in the context of its connections to the roles of Jewish women, it is important to mention here for Barnett’s depiction of a sorrowing Jewish father and a courageous Jewish lover. The story focuses on Sarah’s choice between the Jewish fiancé her father has chosen for her (David) and the Gentile suitor who has been secretly courting her and pressing her to run away with him. The young couple set Purim eve for their elopement. The play then flashes forward several years to find Sarah married to (and miserable with) her Gentile husband. He proves both cruel and a thief. The drama alternates between scenes showing Sarah’s grief at having defied her father and images of her father—now crippled and (literally) blinded by sorrow—wandering the earth in search of her, with the trusty fiancé by his side. When he eventually finds her, her Gentile husband has proven to be dishonest and, it is implied, abusive. Happily, Sarah wakes up to discover that it was all a terrible dream. She resolves to marry her Jewish fiancé and to remain true to her religion. The *Dramatic Mirror* describes a November 6, 1841, Baltimore production as a “pleasing little affair.” In 1843, the Charleston newspaper the *Southern Patriot* promised that the play was full of “thrilling incidents.”<sup>75</sup> The Charleston production featured at least two Jewish actors in the leading roles: Mrs. H. Phillips as Sarah, and her husband, Mr. H. Phillips, as David.<sup>76</sup> Mrs. Phillips even selected it for her benefit performance. The *New York Herald* advertised an 1848 performance at the Chatham Theatre, observing that “it is said to be a most interesting drama.”<sup>77</sup>

Though the play focuses on Sarah's choice, the representation of her father and her Jewish fiancé offer models of Jewish men as defenders of faith and family. David and Sarah's father do not seek retribution for Sarah's elopement. Their nobility of spirit, contrasted with her Gentile suitor's dishonorable conduct, draw Sarah back into the Jewish community, as does David's bravery when he fights her abusive husband at the end of her "dream." As noted above, Barnett was an Anglo-Jewish author. But the fact that his drama appealed to American audiences (and indeed became a star vehicle for some Jewish American performers) suggests that those audiences were not only willing to envision more sympathetic depictions of Jewish male characters in David and Sarah's father, but that there was some room in the cultural landscape for more romantic representations of Jewish men.

#### "TO MAKE AND KEEP US MEN"

The same year that Barnett penned *Sarah the Jewess*, Jewish American playwright George Washington Harby—brother of well-known playwright, editor, and reformer Isaac Harby—was enjoying a strange benefit on the New Orleans stage. It juxtaposed a patriotic play of Harby's authorship with the most blatantly anti-Semitic passage from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. In order to explore what makes the benefit so jarring to a modern scholar, but perhaps less peculiar among Harby's contemporaries, it is necessary to offer a brief overview of Harby's career and the history of Jewish settlement in New Orleans.

Until the late 1820s, New Orleans sheltered a comparatively small Jewish population (estimated at less than forty people), and the city had no synagogue in which Jewish citizens might worship. In 1827, a group of Jewish men founded the city's first synagogue, Shaarai Chesed.<sup>78</sup> Unlike some other Jewish communities in the young nation, the Shaarai Chesed congregation recognized intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles by allowing non-Jewish spouses to be buried in the Jewish graveyard and permitting children born to Jewish fathers and Gentile mothers to join the congregation. Most of the early Jewish settlers in New Orleans were merchants or traders, and, as Bertram Korn notes, they helped to facilitate networks across the southwest territories by supplying itinerant traders. In the 1830s and 1840s,

the city became the gateway for many Jewish (and non-Jewish) performers traveling into Natchez, Mobile, Biloxi, St. Louis, and other cities beyond the New Orleans hub.

Histories of Jewish New Orleans offer tantalizing glimpses into Jews' involvement in the New Orleans theatre from the early national period through the 1850s. For example, colonial settler Angelica Monsanto and her second husband, Robert Dow (a Presbyterian), "loved the theater and took a box when the first professional company opened its stage in New Orleans" in the late 1790s.<sup>79</sup> Korn notes that when Jewish merchant Jacob Hart went bankrupt in 1823, the sheriff's sale of his property included "An Admission Ticket to the French Theatre," suggesting that he was a season subscriber.<sup>80</sup> Publisher and bookbinder Benjamin Levy sold theatre tickets out of his store from the 1820s to the 1840s, and by the middle decades of the 1800s, lawyer Myer M. Cohen (also known as "Judge" Cohen) was a supporter of the German theatre in New Orleans.<sup>81</sup> Several prominent Jewish citizens—including Myer M. Cohen, Joseph Soria, and Isaac N. Marks—were also members of the New Orleans Histrionic Association (founded in 1847), which became a popular feature of the city.<sup>82</sup> In 1848, the board erected a theatre known as the Histrionic Temple (it burned in 1852).<sup>83</sup> The journal *Literary World* reported that the theatre was supported by "nearly all our prominent citizens." Perhaps more tellingly, it observed that the theatre's location placed it in "one of the most enlightened" neighborhoods of the city, "being composed almost entirely of citizens who reside here permanently."<sup>84</sup> This comment suggests that the city's Jewish residents had been able to integrate more smoothly into the New Orleans community and had found a greater degree of acceptance than in some other regions across the United States. As Korn observes, "whatever their interests, Jews in New Orleans seem to have had no trouble in finding non-Jewish friends and associates to enrich their lives and share their leisure as well as their business hours."<sup>85</sup>

This tolerant atmosphere may explain the city's attraction for George Washington Harby. Harby had been born in South Carolina in 1797. Although Charleston had initially been a popular site for Jewish settlement, Gary Zola argues that the environment had grown contentious and restrictive by the 1820s. The city's social climate was made less hospitable to members of the city's Jewish community by a combination of the national religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening and by economic reverses that, incidentally, left theatre benches "deserted," according to the

*Charleston Mercury*.<sup>86</sup> Around 1828, Harby relocated from Charleston to New Orleans, which seemed to offer greater opportunities for Jewish men to forge ties among professional and social networks.

Harby quickly established himself in New Orleans, becoming a member of the local fire association, running several schools (in New Orleans and in Biloxi), running for public office on more than one occasion, and speaking at the dedication of Caldwell's Theatre (also known as the Theatre St. Charles) in 1835. And, like Mordecai Noah and Jonas B. Phillips, he rose to fame as both the author of patriotic plays *and* as a deeply engaged member of his community. One of Harby's early dramatic successes, *Tutoona, or the Indian Girl*,<sup>87</sup> enjoyed its first performance on the anniversary of Washington's birth (February 22, 1835).<sup>88</sup> One review described the audience as "overflowing and delighted" and claimed that the play was "productive of enlightened and patriotic sentiments to the rising generation." Of Harby, the reviewer observed that the play "proves what we have always heard of our fellow-townsmen—that with a generous and noble philanthropy, he has a heart and spirit one would think too great for so small a compass. He has, for a very long time been among us one of the most arduous laborers in the cause of literature." The reviewer proudly claimed Harby as "a native of our soil."<sup>89</sup> Excited New Orleans' theatre crowds called Harby to the stage for a speech.

Critics hailed *Tutoona* as "greatly superior" to *She Would Be a Soldier*, which seems a suggestive comparison.<sup>90</sup> Even though he married outside his faith *twice* and apparently chose not to raise his children in the Jewish religion, critics still seem to have associated Harby with a Jewish identity and with playwright Mordecai Noah.<sup>91</sup> One critic openly proclaimed that Harby's plays surpassed those of "Major Noah."<sup>92</sup>

While some audiences (or at least the New Orleans theatre critics) may have recalled Harby's Jewish connections, Harby himself does not seem to have emphasized them in the same way his brother Isaac did.<sup>93</sup> Yet, as noted earlier, converting or choosing not to openly practice the Jewish faith was no proof against anti-Jewish attacks (as in the case of Israel Israel in the 1790s). The question of the degree of "Jewishness" that audiences assigned to Harby resurfaces in the peculiar incident referenced at the beginning of this section.<sup>94</sup> On March 23, 1838, Harby received a benefit performance at the New Orleans theatre that featured another one of his plays (an adaptation of the immensely popular frontier tale *Nick of the Woods*) and the trial scene from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.<sup>95</sup> That particular scene shows Shy-

lock's ultimate humiliation and defeat at the hands of the Gentiles. Modern scholars must wonder how such a scene presented at the benefit of a Jewish author could be seen as anything but shockingly insensitive or the grossest insult. And yet there is no reason to suppose that the theatre managers had any reason to antagonize Harby. His plays had become incredibly popular, particularly *Nick of the Woods*, which played in cities across the South and which ran for multiple performances at the New Orleans theatre.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, the *Times-Picayune* lionized Harby as a "native" author who might help to rescue American drama from its dependence on European theatre.<sup>97</sup>

If no insult was intended, was *Merchant* scene a parody? By the mid-nineteenth century Shakespearean parodies had become staples of the popular stage, as Lawrence Levine has noted in his seminal study *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. If it was a parody, it would be the quintessential "in-joke" for audiences aware of Isaac Harby's writings on Shakespeare and Shylock. Less than a decade before, Isaac Harby had described Shylock as an "unnatural atrocity" and had criticized Shakespeare for bowing to the prejudices of his age.<sup>98</sup> Alternately, the scene might have served to distance George Washington Harby from his Jewish heritage.<sup>99</sup> It might have been included merely because it was one of the star parts belonging to an actor in *Nick of the Woods*. Or it might have signaled that Harby had achieved what so few of his fellow Jewish-descended authors had: assimilation to the point that his Jewish heritage had simply become another fact about him, but not one that mattered to his neighbors in the audience. It is impossible to know, but equally impossible not to *want* to know, whether he was completely dissociated in the public imagination from the figure of the Jew appearing onstage moments before he took the applause on his benefit night.<sup>100</sup> In considering the paradoxical combination of Shylock and Harby's frontier hero, Sarna's discussion of the disconnect between the "mythical Jew" and the "Jew next door" becomes useful again. It is virtually impossible to know which coping mechanism—suppression, rationalization, elimination, or reconceptualization—was at play in this instance (if indeed any were).<sup>101</sup> Korn has argued that "there was probably less prejudice against Jews in New Orleans during the ante-Bellum period than in any other important city in the country."<sup>102</sup> During his years in New Orleans Harby became a well-respected member of his community, navigating smoothly between his Jewish heritage and the largely Gentile population of his adopted home. The sentiments he expressed in his plays resonated with



Jews and non-Jews alike. While not *requiring* double-coded interpretations, they were certainly open to them.

The last and most dramatic episode of Harby's life had considerable "audience appeal" and might have been drawn straight from his one of his own dramas. In July of 1858, George Washington Harby was tried for the murder of Charles H. C. Stone, a man who had seduced and impregnated Harby's daughter. According to newspaper accounts, Harby shot Stone on March 27, 1858, while Stone was working at his desk in the law firm of Dudley, Nelson, & Co. The trial created a sensation, not simply because it fulfilled all the criteria for contemporary melodrama—with the betrayed maiden, the reckless seducer, and the avenging father—but because the father and daughter's performances at the trial both affirmed and challenged mid-nineteenth-century concepts of patriarchal and filial duty.

Harby's daughter made the unusual choice of taking the stand to refute claims leveled by Stone's friends that she had behaved "in an immodest manner" with numerous men (one of whom claimed to have had sexual relations with her). Trial reports state that Miss Harby refused to sit down, that she stood proudly, raised her hand, and swore that she was innocent. She exclaimed, "I don't see how any men could come here and talk that way about me before my father," at which point she collapsed into tears. Miss Harby's performance of outraged virtue appealed to the jury and to those reading about the trial in two ways. The first was her embodiment of the betrayed woman who had fallen into error and sin but who could still be redeemed. The second was her plea to consider her father, the man whose right and duty it was to avenge her, and a man who, her outburst subtly reminded her accusers, had already killed once to protect her honor and might well challenge anyone spreading new slanders to a duel. After only a short deliberation, the jury acquitted Harby of murder. This decision met with a "roar of approbation" from the spectators, and Harby was cheered along his way home.

Harby's trial appears as yet another public performance of masculine prerogative. Before shooting Stone, Harby made multiple appeals to him to marry his daughter, which Stone declined. Harby also demanded meetings with Stone, whether to discuss the situation or to issue a challenge is unclear. Stone ignored these as well. When Stone refused to respond to Harby's requests for a meeting or a duel, Stone violated the masculine code of honor. Harby took justice into his own hands and murdered the man who had seduced his child. The public trial weighed his crime against

Stone's, and after the ritual recitation of motive and evidence, the jury validated Harby's paternal rights and embraced him for having performed his duty. He was not forced to slink into exile like so many Jewish stage fathers, or perish in a futile attempt to save his daughter. If the Noah-Roberts farce and the Minis-Stark tragedy had demonstrated the failure of Jewish American men to perform the appropriate masculine "script," the Harby murder trial and acquittal marked the emergence of a new type of Jewish father in the public imagination who could at least offer a counterpoint to some of the dominant stereotypes.<sup>103</sup>

A final example of the reconfiguration of Jewish masculinity in pre-Civil War American drama comes from a play that, while never performed, was widely circulated among American Jewish communities of the 1860s and 1870s. Written by Herman M. Moos, the play presents two central Jewish male figures as defiant revolutionaries who enact Old Testament-style vengeance on their enemies (see fig. 4). It also raises questions about the role of violence in Jewish emancipation. Moos's drama, *Mortara, or the Pope and his Inquisitors*, was based on a notorious episode in Bologna, Italy, in 1858. Around 1854, a Catholic maid named Anna Morisi had secretly baptized a little Jewish boy named Edgardo Mortara. Four years later, she confessed it to her priest, claiming that the child had been gravely ill and she had hoped to save him from damnation. Catholic law forbade non-Christians to raise Christians, so the papal authorities seized the boy from his parents to rear as a Catholic. Despite widespread international outrage and legal challenges, the family never recovered the child. Edgardo was raised as a Catholic and eventually entered the priesthood.

Much like the Damascus Affair of almost two decades before, the Mortara case had far-reaching effects on American Jews, and it further underscored the need for greater unity among the nation's Jewish communities. As Leon Jick observes, while numerous synagogues protested formally against the Church's actions, their responses were "typically anarchic," in that Jewish communities from Charleston to San Francisco staged separate protests and many sent separate petitions to the secretary of state. Jick argues that while the overwhelming response demonstrated the "growth" and "influence" of American Jewry, "equally evident was the lack of communal cohesion."<sup>104</sup> The Mortara incident did, however, prompt some Jewish American leaders to form alliances among formerly disparate groups. For example, when a Catholic nurse made a similar attempt on a little boy in New York City, four synagogues (led by the Anshe Chesed Synagogue) successfully joined to

# **MORTARA:**

OR

THE POPE AND HIS INQUISITORS.

---

A DRAMA.

---

TOGETHER WITH

**CHOICE POEMS.**

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BY H. M. MOOS.

---

CINCINNATI, O.,

Published by BLOCH & Co., Israelite Office, 32 Sixth Street.  
1860.

Fig. 4. Title page for *Mortara, or the Pope and his Inquisitors* by Herman M. Moos. (Collection of Princeton University Library, Leonard L. Milberg Collection of Jewish American Writers.)

bring suit against the nurse and to protect the child from a forced baptism.<sup>105</sup> Several New York synagogues also combined to stage a mass protest that drew thousands of supporters.<sup>106</sup> Even the Know-Nothing political party tried to capitalize on the furor over the case to sway Jewish votes.<sup>107</sup>

Though ostensibly a dramatization of the Mortara case, Moos's play pursues a much broader agenda; in doing so, it deviates substantially from the actual events.<sup>108</sup> Perhaps most significantly for an American audience, Moos takes up the theme of Jewish solidarity, proclaiming a need for a universal Jewish alliance and calling upon two of America's most powerful Jewish leaders: Isaac M. Wise and Isaac Leeser. In the play, the Hebrew school teacher, Abraham, praises "Reformer Wise" and "Signor Leeser" as the "young lions" who are leading the charge for Jewish rights. Leeser, as noted above, had established himself in Philadelphia and published the newspaper *The Occident*. Isaac Mayer Wise had immigrated to America in 1846 (some twenty-four years after Leeser). He initially settled in Albany but moved to Ohio in 1854, where he founded the newspaper *The Israelite*. Throughout his life he remained a devout champion of Jewish education, religious reform, and the need for Jewish unity. Though more conservative in his religious beliefs and a vigorous opponent of the reform movement, Isaac Leeser was a no less passionate supporter of Jewish rights. While Meyer and Leeser often disagreed on matters of doctrine, they were united in their profound commitment to ensuring the safety and prosperity of Jewish communities in America and abroad.

The role of violence in that ongoing struggle remained a point of contention. Eighteen years before the Mortara incident, Leeser had explained the apparent reluctance of Damascus Jews to resist their attackers by contending that a people so long oppressed had lost the instinct to resist with physical force and had learned endurance instead. Moos's drama presents arguments for and against the use of violence in the struggle for Jewish liberation, coming down firmly in favor of it. Moos weighs the responsibilities of Jewish men who face oppression. He depicts vividly the tortures visited on Jewish dissenters, speaking to a generation of Americans that had perhaps begun to forget something of Jewish sufferings abroad or who imagined that such things could not happen in the United States. And he portrays a violent, bloody, and decisive uprising of Jews against their tormentors.

While the pro-American rhetoric of the play is not surprising, its level of violence is extraordinary, and it escalates throughout the drama. For example, in act 3, scene 2, the kidnapped boy's father, Mortara, is on a storm-

swept heath in a scene reminiscent of *King Lear*. He is searching for the Austrian ambassador, whom he finds riding across the open field. Mortara's pleas for the ambassador's intercession with the pope on behalf of his son meet with scorn, and the ambassador attempts to pull Mortara's beard. Just as the ambassador reaches out he is struck by lightning and falls dead. Mortara—stunned—proclaims, "Ha, ha!—Jehovah is abroad! / Howl on ye winds! Proclaim the heavenly wrath!"<sup>109</sup> Mortara's cry recalls the theatrical reviews of the 1820s cited in chapter 1, describing those "admirable Hebraisms which . . . carry the mind back to the old glories of the race of Judah."<sup>110</sup> Yet here, Mortara's call to Jehovah is neither quaint nor weak. It is a battle cry of a righteous man, and the scene represents the ultimate vengeful wish-fulfillment against those who refuse to help Jews fight back against their oppressors.

The previous chapter described the patiently suffering stage Jew who became the icon of philo-Semitic behavior and who was embraced by an American audience "unfettered by prejudice." Compared to the bloodthirsty Shylock, whose name was a byword for Jewish villainy, characters such as Sheva and Abednego represented a distinct improvement in the image of Jews on the national stage. Yet many of these characters—whether charitable or vengeful—were also *victims*. Moos's drama reimagines the role of the Jew in drama yet again, presenting him as a victim of violence, but also showing him as an instrument of justice; he does not exact his "pound of flesh" for verbal slights as Shylock does in his quest for vengeance against Antonio, but exercises his *natural* rights as a *man*.

Moos uses the extreme violence in *Mortara* to demonstrate Jewish courage, rather than patient suffering or blind hatred. Perhaps recalling the tortures that inquisitors inflicted on Jews during the Damascus Affair of 1840, act 4 presents a similar litany of abuses against Mortara. The scene opens with Mortara in prison. For two years he has been tormented for failing to relinquish his claims to his son and renounce his Jewish faith, as well as for concealing the whereabouts of his nephew, Jephthah, who is wanted by papal authorities. The inquisitors recount with apparent glee the many abuses inflicted on poor Mortara during his imprisonment. The guards gloat, "Too numerous are the tortures we employed / Here to unfold and thou to listen to." They describe holding him over burning coals, watching while his fingernails dropped off, as the old man "wept, still sobbing prayers forth." They put him on the rack "in the hope that dislocated joints and bones / Might move his adamant will." They smeared his body with honey and suspended

him for wasps to sting, explaining “his form within a basket was swung up / To swarms of horn-mouthed insects to succumb.” The guards marvel that, despite all these tortures, “his eyes were calm.”<sup>111</sup>

For all his courage, Mortara may still have appeared to American readers as an exaggerated version of the peaceful Jewish father figure. By contrast, his nephew, Jephthah, emerges as one of the first true Jewish revolutionaries in American dramatic literature. Jephthah has fallen in love with a Catholic girl named Cornelia. Mortara gives him permission to marry if the girl will agree to convert. Unbeknownst to Jephthah and Mortara, though, Cornelia has been ordered to entrap Jephthah so he can be arrested on charges of seduction. Unable to go through with it, she spurns Jephthah, but the pope’s inquisitors still accuse him, and he flees to America.

Throughout the play, numerous characters invoke America as a haven for Jewish sufferers and a land of opportunity. As one character observes:

Columbia!—happiest of countries!—thrice happy!  
 Columbia! Home of the free—th’asylum of the oppressed  
 Where are no laws save such to make and keep us men  
 Where no distinction between race and race is known  
 Where man is judged according to his worth and not his purse  
 Where freemen call thee brother and love thee for thy choice.

The line about laws that “make and keep us *men*” indicates that Jewish Americans prized the power of law in America to validate masculine prerogative. Yet Moos’s work also underscores how inextricably intertwined the fates of Jewish Americans are with those of their European brethren. While Jews suffer abroad, can Jews in America know justice or peace? Indeed, the two Jewish characters in *Mortara* who initially flee to America to escape the Inquisition return to certain danger to help liberate their compatriots.

The play presents the arguments for and against the use of violence in the struggle for Jewish liberation. The kidnapped boy’s former tutor, Abraham, cautions Jephthah to “show courage only when it can succeed / Unconscious seem to wrongs thou canst not cure.” Jephthah rages back at him in a speech that might be taken directly from Robert Montgomery Bird’s popular tragedy *The Gladiator* and which echoes the rhetoric of men such as John Brown or Frederick Douglass in their diatribes against slavery:

Let those condemn who choose a fawning life  
 I'd rather live in hell than be a cringing slave  
 That Rome may spit upon my servile brow  
 And I must thank her for the honor shown  
 By Jehovah! Is Israel's courage dead?  
 Are these the men that shook the world of old  
 And fought against oppression with a tiger's wrath?  
 I tell you [teacher] Israel only sleeps  
 She's still the same—the paragon of strength!  
 Arouse her pride—her dignity—her worth  
 And courage, like a re-born Hercules,  
 Will raise her arm and conquer her just rights.

Unable to enjoy his freedom in America while he knows his fellow Jews are suffering at home, Jephthah returns to Rome and leads an uprising against the pope. He justifies the use of violence, crying, "If legislation won't give us our rights, why who dare blame us for the force applied?"<sup>112</sup> He frees Mortara's son, but during the rebellion, the pope shoots Jephthah, who in turn stabs the pope to death!<sup>113</sup>

The extreme language and action render Moos's work essentially unstageable. The tone of *Mortara* recalls both the brutal closet dramas of the antislavery movement (some of which depict the crucifixion of slaves, for example) and the real-life violence of incidents like John Brown's 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry. Jephthah and Mortara prove themselves willing to stand as martyrs in the name of Jewish freedom. Moos's work judges harshly those who refuse to take up the cause of Jewish freedom; in keeping with the mood of the nation on the eve of the Civil War, he predicts that violence proves the only viable solution where petition and processes of law have failed.

By 1860, new Jewish heroes had entered the American dramatic lexicon. Those included men who embraced the freedoms offered by their new land but who refused to forget the agony of their brethren far away. They could win the love of a Gentile woman rather than admire her hopelessly from afar. They could take decisive, rebellious action and were willing to demonstrate their patriotism at the cost of their own lives. They refused the badge of patient sufferance in favor of action. In many ways, Moos's Jewish heroes fulfilled the republican promise that Benjamin Nones and Haym Salomon had made two generations before.



## CHAPTER THREE

### *Strangers in a Strange Land*

#### From the Wandering Jew to the Cosmopolitan Citizen

What if it be the mission of the so-called Wandering Jew to preserve in the Hebrew mind the recollection of the former glories of the race, and to keep alive the longing once more to revive them? The moment that idea finds entry into the mind, the legend ceases to be childish and the longing is no longer unaccountable.

—*THE HEBREW TALISMAN*, 1836<sup>1</sup>

Every place you go, act according to the custom of the place.

—*A PORTION OF THE PEOPLE*<sup>2</sup>

Writing about wandering Jewish artists presents an inherent challenge, since any story about wanderers must appear diffuse and incomplete at times. They travel laden with what scholar Adam Mendelsohn has described as “cultural cargo,” eternally in quest of a viable marketplace for their intellectual and artistic wares.<sup>3</sup> The word “wandering” also necessarily implies rootlessness, a convenient fiction that was often attached to Jews (according to Isaac Mayer Wise), but one that became harder and harder to sustain as seventeenth-century Jews developed networks throughout European and Atlantic systems. In doing so, they became what historians have often termed “Port Jews,” moving across Anglophone territories and emerging, as Jonathan Sarna has described, as “the largest and most culturally creative Jewish diaspora in the world.”<sup>4</sup> The previous chapter focused on efforts to root the Jewish masculine character in the American imagination, in defiance of turmoil overseas and at home. This chapter shifts attention to theatre artists who traversed the nation in the seventy-five-year period after the American Revolution, exploring how their performances shaped audiences’ impression of where Jews belonged in the American cultural landscape. It follows

that “culturally creative diaspora” through peripatetic Jewish performers and theatre managers who trekked the nation’s earliest acting circuits, as well as those who ventured across the early frontiers in Ohio, Kentucky, Louisiana, Tennessee, California, and elsewhere. It also touches on the diasporic populations that settled in cities such as Charleston, Savannah, New York, Newport, and Richmond, and forged cosmopolitan networks that placed them at the center of what historian Rhys Isaac terms “knots of dramatic encounter,”<sup>5</sup> or what Mendelsohn describes as a “vast web of enterprise.”<sup>6</sup>

As this “vast web” unfurled across the new nation, it enabled encounters between Jewish American audience members and Jewish artists who wandered into their communities for a night or a theatrical season. Did those “dramatic encounters” (dramatic in every sense of the word) prompt Jewish audience members to question their own sense of belonging in American culture? Did the performers who ranged across the still-growing nation come to imagine themselves “at home”? While the answers to these questions are largely unknowable, some hints linger in the way Jewish artists described their encounters with new populations, or the brief glimpses of communities’ responses to the presence of these outsiders offered in letters, diaries, and newspapers.

## EARLY DRAMATIC ENCOUNTERS

By the end of the eighteenth century, the comic stereotype of the Wandering Jew had begun to merge with the image of the *cosmopolitan* Jew (in the Gentile imagination at least).<sup>7</sup> The “new” Wandering Jew was one whose vast experience and knowledge had given him that virtue of compassion so conspicuously absent in the original myth of the character as the figure who spurns Christ on his way to the Crucifixion and was condemned to roam the earth until the Second Coming. His enforced travels as a character “punished without pardon” prepared him to empathize with the sufferings of others and to engage in a society that placed a strong value on sentimental citizenship.<sup>8</sup> He built networks throughout his journeys, rather than merely passing through various landscapes. Richard Kagan and Philip Morgan describe the early Atlantic Jewish experience as “relentlessly fluid, border-crossing, and culture-bridging,” qualities that point to increasingly cosmopolitan sensibilities and an awareness of the need to be able to “act according to the custom of the place.”<sup>9</sup>

The notion of “cosmopolitanism” helped to define the experience of Jewish stage characters at the end of the eighteenth century, though often in terms distinctly different from those applied to other types of characters. An elite Gentile character, for example, might regard a cosmopolitan education as a rite of passage that fitted a citizen to participate intellectually in polite society.<sup>10</sup> Its role in placing Jews in their “proper” milieu, however, is harder to determine, but appears linked to the development of an emotional rather than an intellectual or cultural vocabulary.<sup>11</sup> Amir Eshel argues that Jewish cosmopolitanism presents a problematic concept because Jews do not identify “belonging” in more traditional Christian terms as anchored to one space or place.<sup>12</sup> Rather, Eshel suggests, “it is the performative sanctification” of “language spoken or heard in a certain place” that renders a site *makom* (a place of the sublime).<sup>13</sup> According to Eshel, Jews do not ascribe *inherent* meaning to specific sites. Rather “space” becomes “place” through action and revelation. Eshel’s concept of Jewish topographies and the ways in which artists “depict, imagine, and transgress” landscapes in metaphorical or allegorical terms may prove useful in situating the cosmopolitan Jew in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American theatre.<sup>14</sup> His theory also offers obvious parallels to the temporary relationships formed between spectators and traveling performers through the language spoken in the playhouse. The texts spoken in the theatre could perform a different kind of sanctification, helping to locate and fix both audience and performer in the aesthetic place/space of performance.<sup>15</sup> But before delving into these rituals, it may first be helpful to consider a different kind of transgression and performance in Jewish America.

#### COSMOPOLITAN CHARACTERS AND SENTIMENTAL CITIZENSHIP

Between 1752 and 1776, a handful of advertisements appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* describing runaway Jewish servants:

**EIGHT DOLLARS Reward.** RUN away from the Subscriber . . . a Servant Man, named Joseph David, born in Germany, a Jew by Profession,<sup>16</sup> is now about 30 Years of Age, about five Feet three Inches high, well set, of a dark Complexion, and has three Scars on his Head. . . . It is likely he follows Peddling, as he had a great Desire to follow that Calling, and often talked about it.

N.B. It is likely he will deny his being a Servant, and use many Arguments to support it, being an artful Fellow.<sup>17</sup>

**RUN away from the subscriber,** living in Earl township, Lancaster county, a Dutch servant lad, goes by the name of John Miller in his indenture, but calls himself Reuben Leapeman, is a Jew, and may be known by his speech, about 19 years of age, four feet ten inches high, of a yellow complexion, with curled black hair.<sup>18</sup>

**THREE POUNDS Reward.** RUN away this morning, from the subscriber, living in Third street, in the city of Philadelphia, a Dutch servant man, named PHILIP MARKS, a Jew, about 5 feet 5 inches high, slim made, lisps and speaks bad English, of a dark complexion and long visage, wears his own long black hair, mostly tied behind; he is addicted to lying and swearing.<sup>19</sup>

On the surface, runaway ads may seem to have little relevance to interpreting histories of Jewish performers in America. Yet note the references to “yellow” or dark complexions and short stature so stereotypically ascribed to Jewish characters in drama and popular fiction. Moreover, the language used in the advertisements paints not only physical but moral portraits of the runaways and sketches the distinct Jewish character types that the men embodied for the complainants. Each runaway ad carries a label: “peddler,” an “addiction to lying and swearing,” the charge of being an “artful fellow,” or an alert that one runaway had changed his name from the identifiably Jewish one of Reuben Leapeman to the utterly Anglophilic “John Miller.”<sup>20</sup> One might find similar kinds of shorthand descriptions of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* or Isaac Mendoza in *The Duenna*, suggesting that they were as commonplace as they were clichéd.

Pejorative comments about Jews—whether in dramatic scripts or runaway ads—may not seem surprising in the context of mid-eighteenth-century Gentile American culture. But these runaway ads resurrect the image of the Wandering Jew in a potentially troubling way. The very openness of the American landscape heightened anxieties about malign individuals’ opportunities to pass in and among settled communities.<sup>21</sup> For the authors of the runaway advertisements in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, the escaping Jewish figures represented transgression and potential danger. While the runaways’ “Jewish” characteristics might make them stand out among a

predominantly Gentile population, those qualities could be outweighed by cosmopolitan experience that would allow the Jews to blend into their environment and move from town to town unnoticed, aided by their new names and their talents for telling stories. In mapping their own journeys across the American landscape, these runaway Jews violated Christian topographies, landscapes dotted with churches and meeting houses that openly celebrated the strength of Gentile American culture.

The early American stage had inherited many of the biases and anxieties about Jews who strayed beyond their “proper” sphere from earlier British dramas, such as Charles Macklin’s 1759 *Love à la Mode* (mentioned briefly in chapter 1). Macklin’s character of the “Beau” Mordecai shows a Jew who attempts to distill his wandering/cosmopolitan experience into an impressive personality. Yet according to Macklin, “The character is an egregious coxcomb, who is striving to be witty; at the top of dress with an awkward fancy of his own, so as to be ridiculous and as badly matched or sorted as such a fellow ignorant of propriety can be. His manner is very lively—singing, conceited, dancing—throwing himself out body, voice, and mind, as much as conceit and ignorance and impudence can effect.”<sup>22</sup> Matthew Biberman suggests that the Beau Mordecai’s *foreign* excesses offer a means to assess normative (Gentile) bourgeois masculinity. More importantly, he notes, Mordecai’s presence underscores the prospective danger of assimilated populations and bloodlines. One character describes Mordecai as “a composeetion [*sic*] of Jews, Turks, and refugees, and of aw [all] the commercial vagrants of the land and sea—a sort of ampheebious [*sic*] breed ye are.”<sup>23</sup> Inter marriage—the specter conjured throughout the play—could have raised disturbing questions for American audiences about how a formerly itinerant (and often despised) populace of “commercial vagrants” might reinvent itself in a new country that had looser naturalization laws than England (and thus fewer bars to citizenship).<sup>24</sup>

On April 17, 1798, Andrew Franklin’s comedy *The Wandering Jew* debuted on the Philadelphia stage.<sup>25</sup> In this brief comedy, Franklin highlights the highly theatrical nature of what Michael Ragussis terms the “ethnic spectacle” performed in eighteenth-century Anglo-British culture through a combination of behaviors described in the text; the “wanderers” in the play counterfeit a series of signs and behaviors that indicate “Jewishness” to the spectators. Ragussis points to these exchanges as part of the “potentially infinite play of representation and reproduction that occurs in the cultural construction of Jewish identity.”<sup>26</sup> His phrase “infinite play” can assume al-

ternate meanings in the context of theatrical performance.<sup>27</sup> The embedded clues carried in such plays communicate to an audience that performances of Jewishness are consciously constructed ones, and there is a kind of meta-theatrical commentary accompanying such representations that invites audiences to cross-reference its catalogue of “Jewish” behaviors with the bodies of the actors presenting them onstage.

Set in London, Franklin’s play invokes the mythical figure of the Wandering Jew as both a plot device and a source of humor. An adventurer named Atall falls in love with a young woman named Lydia. Lydia’s father, Sir Solomon, tells her he will disinherit her if she marries without his consent. With the help of his friend Marall, Atall concocts a plan for them to masquerade as the Wandering Jew and his “secretary,” Juba. In this guise, Atall will pretend to be on the lookout for a wife to whom he may leave his immense fortune. The ruse sets up an extended comic scene in which the “Jews,” Atall and Marall, recall their first trip to London (with Julius Caesar) and their drinking days with Paul Rubens and Michelangelo.<sup>28</sup> As the scene continues, Atall and Marall betray themselves as non-Jews in numerous ways, such as Marall’s claim of witnessing the *christening* of Romulus and Remus in Rome. This gaffe prompts Atall to exclaim in an aside, “Oh! Worse and Worse—Jews at a christening and the infant a pagan!”<sup>29</sup> Sir Solomon grows suspicious and asks if the “Jews” have ever been to Ireland, since he detects a hint of an Irish accent in their voices. Marall quickly claims to have traveled through Egypt with Saint Patrick and picked up a “smack of the dialect” from him.<sup>30</sup> Eventually, Atall and Marall are unmasked, but all ends happily as the would-be lovers are united.

Franklin’s play overflows with trickster figures and characters impersonating other nationalities or races. For example, Franklin describes (although he does not show) a scene in which two other Jews—disguised as a French Marquis and a Dutch burgomaster—con a wealthy Englishwoman into buying a counterfeit painting.<sup>31</sup> Would an American audience—whether made up of Jews or Gentiles—have experienced that same sense of “infinite play” and recognized similar opportunities for juxtaposing stereotyped behaviors of the Wandering Jew against not only the character of Atall but also against the persona of the performer playing both Jew and Gentile simultaneously? While this question is impossible to answer on a national scale, it can be examined on a more local, case-by-case basis. For example, Philadelphia audiences of 1798 certainly could have made this kind of comparison. When *The Wandering Jew* opened at the Chestnut Street Theatre, it was on

the benefit night for John Edmund Harwood, who played the role of Atall.<sup>32</sup> Harwood was a British-born actor and only in his mid-twenties when he impersonated the centuries-old Jewish traveler. William Dunlap describes him as “engaging in manners and remarkably handsome in the form and expression of his countenance,” and a portrait of the young Harwood shows a classically modeled young man.<sup>33</sup> His list of early roles reveals he often played more roguish leading men, and he seems to have made something of a specialty of playing comic Jewish characters and imposters.<sup>34</sup> His popularity among Philadelphia audiences would have allowed spectators to juxtapose their knowledge of his professional persona with the exaggerated list of Jewish traits he performed onstage. Harwood’s familiarity within his local community could have provided a counterpoint to the “foreignness” of the Wandering Jew, underscoring the perpetual tension between insiders and outsiders.<sup>35</sup>

A play such as *The Wandering Jew* implicitly assumes that the audience will be “in” on the joke and know enough about how Jews conduct themselves in daily life to make Atall and Marall’s mistakes both obvious and humorous. If Atall and Marall could *successfully* pass as Jews, the play would lose much of its humor and would take on a more sinister quality. The characters may present a catalogue of stereotypical behaviors or appear draped in their “Jewish gabardine” (as Shylock says), but they must eventually draw a veil between Jew and Gentile worlds, pointing to the unknowable in the Jewish tradition through their inability to sustain their role-playing. Atall and Marall can assume and discard their Jewish identities as it suits them, but what of Jewish American performers less able to shed stereotypes?

#### “ASPIRING TO RESIDENCY”

An elusive actor named Mr. Solomon offers a useful point of entry into the history of the Wandering Jew on and off the early American stage.<sup>36</sup> Mr. Solomon even appeared in *The Wandering Jew* in Charleston in 1799, and although he did not play either Atall or Marall, he did portray a character in a double disguise: a con artist impersonating a Dutch (Jewish) ex-burgomaster who in turn costumes himself as a porter to trick a gullible lady out of £400 for a counterfeit painting.

Before exploring Solomon’s career, it is important to note the histories that have either claimed or denied him as the head of the first Jewish



American acting family. I cannot offer definitive “proof” of Solomon’s Jewish heritage, but even *tentatively* placing him as one of the first Jewish American performers after the Revolution illuminates the tricky social, economic, and political networks of the early national theatre. It also allows me to explore the “knots of dramatic encounter” that dot his life. Solomon has been labeled alternately as “probably Jewish,” “probably not Jewish,” and definitely Jewish.<sup>37</sup> Mention of Mr. Solomon appears in Joseph R. Rosenbloom’s *Biographical Dictionary of Early American Jews* (published in 1960), which questions whether the Solomon acting family was Jewish because Rosenbloom cannot confirm their membership in any synagogue. Failure to join a synagogue, however, would hardly have been surprising for actors who moved as often as the Solomons (and given the comparative rarity of synagogues in early America, when many communities had trouble merely gathering a minyan). Moreover, the absence of the Solomons’ name on a synagogue’s membership roll would not necessarily indicate a failure to attend an occasional service on High Holy Days. By contrast, Henry Morais’s history *The Jews of Philadelphia* (published in 1894), identifies the Solomon family as definitely Jewish, although Morais does not provide documentation for this assertion; he simply presents it as a known fact. Mordecai Noah’s *Literary Autobiography*<sup>38</sup> points to the Solomon family as “probably Jews” and cites their mention in eighteenth-century theatre manager William Dunlap’s *History of the American Theatre*.<sup>39</sup>

With scant surviving details of his origins, his family life, or even his various residences during a roughly fifteen-year trajectory that took him from the major urban centers of the new nation to its tiniest backwaters, Solomon offers a case study in the challenges of tracing potential Jewish American contributions to early American theatre. If Solomon was born in the United States, it would make him among the first Jewish American performers on the national stage.<sup>40</sup> The significance of his Jewish identity—if he was indeed of Jewish ancestry—may be more meaningful to scholars hoping to craft a genealogy of Jewish American culture than it was to Solomon himself. And of course the impulse to claim “firsts” is a telling one for historians tracing lives among a population that found itself so continually uprooted. A “first” offers a place of origin, however humble, and it anchors a narrative to a fixed point in history. Placing Solomon among the “firsts” in Jewish American theatre history would extend the tale of Jewish contributions to American theatre culture several decades before the advent of playwrights and performers such as Noah, Aaron Phillips, Jonas B. Phillips,

Moses "Nosey" Phillips, William Dinneford, and Rose Eytinge, who were *known* to be Jewish. It would insert Jewish Americans into the narrative at a critical point in the formation of the nation's postwar theatre.

In his essay "The Jewish Presence in the London Theatre, 1660–1800," Kalman A. Burnim notes that British actors of Jewish origin frequently concealed their Jewish heritage by changing their names or choosing not to practice their faith in visible ways.<sup>41</sup> By contrast, the Solomon family retained a name that, while it does not confirm their Jewish lineage, certainly implies that Mr. Solomon (at least) might have been of Jewish descent. It also seems unlikely that the Solomons had traveled from Europe to establish careers as performers in the United States. While Mr. Solomon's ancestors were undoubtedly European, Mr. and Mrs. Solomon were often described as being from "the South" or "the Southward," and the name Solomon(s) appears among the early Jewish populations of Georgia and South Carolina.<sup>42</sup>

Though he never became a star, Mr. Solomon resurfaces, Zelig-like, throughout strategic moments in early American theatre history. For example, in April of 1785 Mr. Solomon appeared with the Ryan Company during its brief and controversial residence in Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>43</sup> As noted above, whether Mr. Solomon was *from* South Carolina is unclear.<sup>44</sup> The descriptions that mention him being "from the South" could have arisen because he spent considerable time touring in Charleston, Richmond, and Baltimore (as well as many smaller southern towns). There is, however, a Mr. Solomon listed among the members of a 1779 militia group that became known as the "Jew Company" for the large number of Jewish South Carolinians in the outfit. In 1821, M. Jacob Cohen compiled a roster of the Jewish members of the troop, along with some limited biographical information. The list includes a number of men named Solomon(s), including one listing that lacks a first name and is simply noted as "Solomon." One additional note about this particular Mr. Solomon suggests that he is about to be married, though it does not name the bride.<sup>45</sup> If the Mr. Solomon on Cohen's list was indeed Mr. Solomon the performer, it would make him one of the few early American actors to have participated in the Revolution. Moreover, his appearance on that list would likely signal his membership in the region's Jewish community (whether or not he attended synagogue).<sup>46</sup> Confirming any of these possibilities for Mr. Solomon the performer would certainly make him a "first" among Jewish American theatre artists, but this is a thread in Mr. Solomon's narrative that has, to date, yielded no definitive results.<sup>47</sup>

Whatever his possible prewar Charleston connection, on September

13, 1786, the *Charleston Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* informed readers that Mr. Solomon had returned to Charleston from Baltimore to join the city's new theatre troupe. The paper praised Mr. Solomon's improvement from the previous year but recommended that "he had better sing new songs than old ones."<sup>48</sup> The critic's recollection of Mr. Solomon's past appearance marks his transition from itinerant actor to a familiar figure on the local stage. The acknowledgment of his improvement and gentle rebuke over his song choice implies an investment in Solomon's performance as he became *known* to the community. He was perhaps no longer a wanderer, but a traveler who had returned home. So where had Mr. Solomon been between April 1785 and September 1786? Evidence housed in the Maryland Historical Society links him to a small postwar theatre company in Baltimore. It also offers a possible key to Mr. Solomon's personality and may explain some of his subsequent travels.

Tucked into a slim file of theatre manager Dennis Ryan's correspondence rests a letter from Ryan's colleague, J. Heard, dated November 23, 1785.<sup>49</sup> In it, Heard describes an incident in which Solomon "got vexed and abused me because I chose Mr. Wall for the part of Leander instead of himself, this the whole company can testify."<sup>50</sup> Heard tells Ryan that he is writing because Ryan's wife had apparently heard a different account of the episode and had reported to her husband that Solomon had been fired for "some heinous crime." Heard denies this, averring, "I assure you on my honour he never was discharged."<sup>51</sup> Solomon clearly envisioned himself in more substantial roles by 1785, and when he could not get them with the Baltimore troupe he decided to return to Charleston to try his luck again there. Solomon's rude exchange with Heard might have been an amateur's mistake, but it might also provide a key to the character of a performer who spent the rest of his career moving from city to city, always in search of a better situation and perpetually dissatisfied at being relegated to minor roles.<sup>52</sup>

Chasing Mr. Solomon up and down the eastern theatre circuit becomes a dizzying task, since he often moved multiple times in a single year. To map his itinerary over the next fifteen years of his career would engulf the remainder of this chapter, but four additional dramatic encounters in his biography merit discussion, since they illuminate the ways this wanderer struggled to make a place for himself in the early American theatre. In the first dramatic encounter, Solomon attempted to launch an opera company; in the second, he found himself in a dispute with a theatre manager over a refusal to fulfill his contract; in the third he made a strategic appeal to local Masons to sup-

port his wife's benefit night; and in the fourth, he encountered a young man in a small town who had never seen a live theatrical performance.

February of 1792 found Mr. Solomon in Newport, Rhode Island, along with his wife (known to the historical record only as "Mrs. Solomon") and at least one child (a little girl who appears on playbills as "Miss Solomon"). There, Solomon, along with a performer named Murray, proposed launching an opera company.<sup>53</sup> According to nineteenth-century local historian Charles Blake, these "inferior actors" somehow "obtained permission to give three theatrical entertainments on condition of paying to the town sergeant for the use of the poor, three-fourths of the proceeds of the tickets of the first evening." As Blake observes, however, "these performances met with but little encouragement, being destitute of merit."<sup>54</sup>

It is not surprising that Solomon ventured into opera, since he was best-known as a singer.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, comic operas were popular with general audiences, while European operas appealed to those with more cosmopolitan tastes. An opera company might have represented the ideal combination of the popular and more sophisticated forms that American audiences demanded. Assuming that Solomon *was* of Jewish origin, Newport was a logical choice for his venture. Before the war Newport had been home to some of the country's wealthiest Jewish citizens. They had formed a tight social network and might have rallied to support Solomon's project. As Blake writes, in the years before the Revolution, "Newport contained about sixty Jewish families, many of whom were wealthy; and from these the actors would naturally expect a liberal patronage, as the Jews from time immemorial have been conspicuous in their support of the drama."<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately for Solomon, the war had decimated not only the city's Jewish population but its wealth as well. The lack of a local network, coupled with the state's lingering antitheatre laws, doomed Solomon's venture. Just as in Baltimore, his bid for fame and independence ended in disappointment.

Later that same year, Solomon resurfaced in the Board Alley Theatre in Boston as part of that city's first (illegal) theatre season. Joseph Harper had initiated a series of performances in August of 1792. By October, the Solomons appeared on playbills in performances designed to skirt Boston's antitheatre prohibitions. For example, an advertisement on October 5, 1792, promised audiences a "Moral Lecture . . . in five parts" titled *The Tragical History of George Barnwell, or the London Merchant*. The transparent ruse fooled no one. Ultimately, Boston's sheriff raided Board Alley on December 5, 1792. Efforts to shut down the theatre prompted a riot in the playhouse. While

no account remains of Solomon's part in the affray, he nevertheless became an unwitting witness to a turning point in Boston's theatre history. The riot also underscored the tenuous nature of his family's security in their new city.

Subsequent months found the Solomons touring as singers and monologists. They returned to Baltimore for a brief season with the contentious theatrical team of M'Grath and Godwin (whom Sonneck describes as "two of the most erratic actors" in America).<sup>57</sup> When that company dissolved unexpectedly, they took to the road again, winding up in Cape Ann, Massachusetts. There they became embroiled in yet another theatrical fracas, as demonstrated in an open letter from theatre manager Joseph Harper (late of the Boston playhouse) published in a local Newport newspaper on May 5, 1794.<sup>58</sup> In the article Harper apologizes for the delayed opening of his promised Newport theatrical season. He informs readers that he had expected a company of performers from Cape Ann, including the Solomons. He had received a letter from Mr. Solomon claiming delay because their current manager refused to pay them until they completed an additional round of performances in Portsmouth. As the wait extended, Harper dispatched a colleague to hasten their arrival. The friend returned with news that "the company proposed to remain an uncertain time at Portsmouth."<sup>59</sup> Harper railed against the ingratitude of these players who refused to honor their engagement. It is difficult to know what lay behind the Solomons' choice to break their contract with Harper, whether it was memories of their earlier sojourn in Newport, their past negative experience with Harper in Boston, the lure of a more stable season in Portsmouth, where they played leading roles, or the threat of renewed antitheatrical agitation in Rhode Island.<sup>60</sup> Having burned their bridges with Harper, the Solomons eventually joined the Old American Theatre Company in Philadelphia.

On November 7, 1794, playbills announced a benefit for Mrs. Solomon at the city's Southwark Theatre.<sup>61</sup> The advertisement included a "Masonic Song" to be performed by "Brother Solomon." Solomon's membership in the Masons (as suggested by the reference to his status as "Brother") is important because it links him to a national network that was for many years a crucial factor in actors' ability to move successfully from city to city and find ready-made allies and audiences among their Masonic brethren.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, for at least sixty years the Masons had offered opportunities for Jewish American citizens to mingle with their Gentile neighbors in a community ostensibly free from religious bias. As Odai Johnson observes, "It was a universal society, not bound by religion or party, in which men of all

orders would find a model for social intercourse. Freemasons, with their platform of universal acceptance, offered the perfect social network for the actor or manager aspiring to residency.”<sup>63</sup> The addition of a “Masonic Song” to Mrs. Solomon’s benefit suggests that she and her family anticipated drawing her husband’s fellow Masons to her benefit and increasing the evening’s revenue.<sup>64</sup>

Jewish Americans played an important role in the Masonic community, serving as both members and leaders of local lodges.<sup>65</sup> Regional histories of Jewish Americans, such as Myron Berman’s *Richmond’s Jewry, 1769–1976*, chronicle the importance of Masonic ties in forging social and commercial networks. And William Pencak recounts a wartime incident involving Philadelphian Israel Israel, who flashed the Masonic sign at a trial, thus securing his acquittal.<sup>66</sup> Solomon’s status as a Mason let him claim a ceremonial kinship with hundreds of audience members. Despite Solomon’s link to the Masons, however, he never parlayed that connection into a sustained network of supporters or established a permanent home for himself or his family.<sup>67</sup>

Scouring city directories yields scant evidence of Mr. Solomon’s whereabouts during what appear to have been the last years of his career before he disappears from the historical record.<sup>68</sup> He performed with companies in cities ranging from Savannah to Boston, and while he sometimes traveled with his wife and family, he frequently appeared alone while his wife and daughter appeared in another city. Whether this was due to family strife or to Mr. Solomon’s inability to hold a permanent position in a company remains unclear. Whatever the explanation, Mr. Solomon’s constant oscillation between familiar face and unknown entity is intriguing. A letter from Petersburg, Georgia, in 1799 finds Mr. Solomon surfacing as still just another name on a list some fifteen years after the start of his career.

Though Petersburg has vanished from modern maps (its original site now lies under Clarks Hill Lake), at the beginning of the nineteenth century it was a thriving tobacco town of roughly four hundred inhabitants. Situated by the Savannah River, it offered a convenient point of passage from Georgia to South Carolina and a handy place for traveling performers to stop for a week or two on their way back and forth on the southern circuit. Sixteen-year-old Petersburg resident and law student John Williams Walker (later a senator from Alabama) describes one such visit of itinerant performers in a letter to his eighteen-year-old compatriot, Larkin Newby (later a state legislator for North Carolina):

The play actors have been in town and went out on Sunday. Their names are Messrs. Williamson, Taylor, Hughes, Ryder, Solomon, & Lewis. Mrs. Williamson and Mrs. Hughes. The first night they acted a comedy called *The Provoked Husband*, to which was added a farce called *The Spoild Child* [*sic*]. Mrs. Williamson acted the spoild child and she did it admirably you may be sure. The second night they acted the comedy of *The Child of Nature* to which was added *The Lawyer nonsuited*, or *No Song No Supper* which was peculiarly funny. On the third night, they performed *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* to which they added the farce of the *Virgin Unmasked*. If you recollect this was the play you proposed acting last summer. The fourth night they acted a comedy called *The Country Girl* to which they added *The Poor Soldier* which was as funny as anything I ever saw. On the fifth night, they performed the comedy of *The Stranger* & a farce called the *Sultan*, or a *Peep into the Seraglio*. And on the sixth and last night they acted the comedy of *The Mountain-eers* or *Love and Madness*, to which they added a farce called *The Romp*. This was the last time they performed and I wish I had the ability to describe it to you—Mr. Hughes and Mrs. Williamson are the best actors and were you to see Mrs. Williamson in men's clothes. I would you—but Mrs. Hughes is as handsome a figure in men's clothes, except for her face, as I ever saw in my life.<sup>69</sup>

Walker's letter fixes Mr. Solomon at yet another strategic moment in American theatre history. The end of the eighteenth century witnessed a proliferation in the number of performers struggling to establish a toehold on the American theatre landscape. Several major urban theatrical ventures (those in Charleston, New York, and Boston, most notably) were suffering financially as a result of too-rapid expansion and an inability to attract sufficient audiences throughout a theatrical season. Actors unable to attach themselves to major theatres might take to the road to try their luck in areas less inundated with entertainments. The fact that Walker attended all six performances of the visiting company in Petersburg indicates that this was a fruitful strategy. Young Walker notes in a subsequent letter in 1803: "I never was at the performance of plays by actors except in Petersburg some 4 or 5 years ago, when Williamson conducted a company of strollers into that place. I had always been fond of reading plays, but as you may naturally suppose, I was delighted with the performance."<sup>70</sup> Walker's description of the "company of strollers" returns Mr. Solomon to his status as wanderer, just as



he has, in a sense, wandered through the footnotes of theatre history, his origins, heritage, and significance disputed. Solomon may never achieve a definitive status as a “first” in Jewish American theatre history, but he remains as a mysterious figure whose struggle to make a permanent place for himself mirrors that of many Jewish Americans at the end of the eighteenth century.

“I WILL GO TO THE BORDER AND LOOK IN”<sup>71</sup>

If Mr. Solomon’s career as a perpetual wanderer signaled his failure to become a resident star, actor John Howard Payne’s constant travels became the hallmark of his success. According to Payne’s biographer Gabriel Harrison, “It is a mistaken notion many people have that Mr. Payne was a lonely wanderer on the earth.” Harrison argues that “although alone, and a cosmopolite from inclination,” Payne had a habit and a skill for making his “home” wherever he found himself.<sup>72</sup> Theatre historians have written of John Howard Payne, the juvenile sensation who roamed Europe before returning with great fanfare to his native heath.<sup>73</sup> Payne gained his greatest renown for penning the song “Home Sweet Home,” but his career ranged well beyond the stage. He had an abiding interest in Native Americans, claiming to recognize among their rituals some that echoed those of the synagogue. And, like Noah, Payne also served as consul to Tunis.

Although he did not practice, Payne was of Jewish descent.<sup>74</sup> His maternal grandfather, William Isaacs, was Jewish. Isaacs’s gravestone bears the epitaph, “An Israelite indeed in whom there was no guile.”<sup>75</sup> After Payne’s death, friends found among his possessions “a quaint old seal ring with a Hebrew inscription (an old family treasure that used to belong to his grandfather).”<sup>76</sup> It is not clear how much Payne’s heritage shaped his daily experience, although Jacob Rader Marcus questions whether Payne’s sensitivity to “matters Jewish” may have been his motive in excising a stereotyped Jewish character from his 1809 translation of Kotzebue’s *Lover’s Vow*.<sup>77</sup>

Payne’s potentially conflicted relationship with his own Jewish heritage, however, is less intriguing in this instance than the way he wanders in and out of the letters of one Jewish family—the Mordecais—and helps to demonstrate their cosmopolitan tastes.<sup>78</sup> The itinerant star Payne becomes the vehicle for mapping the Mordecais’ engagement with Jewish and Gentile networks around them, and he serves as a yardstick for measuring the cultural cargo in which the family traded in its own wanderings over a number of years.

The Mordecai family was one of the best-known and most respected southern Jewish families in nineteenth-century America.<sup>79</sup> On the eve of their move to North Carolina at the end of the eighteenth century, Judith Mordecai (the family's matriarch) had written to her father, "You will think with me that we are the Wandering Jews, but I still hope when we get there we shall be settled until we attain the object we have so long pursued in vain."<sup>80</sup> The family opened a successful school in Warrenton, and both male and female family members became renowned educators. Their thousands of letters reflect not only their erudition but their interest in both classical and contemporary culture. Ultimately, the Mordecais' sophistication demonstrated their ability to trade in the kind of "cultural cargo" that marked them as intellectually (if not geographically) cosmopolitan in their outlook.<sup>81</sup> Their history suggests how the "Wandering Jews" of Judith's letter put down roots through their involvement in a network of Jewish and Gentile acquaintances, united by ties of blood, Masonic brotherhood, financial investments, and circulation in Richmond's most elite social circles (including the playhouse).

Mention of Payne first surfaces in a letter from Samuel Mordecai to his sister Rachel on January 15, 1810. Samuel writes from Richmond, Virginia, to Warrenton, North Carolina, where Rachel was working as a teacher in her family's school. He describes Payne's debut at the Richmond playhouse:

I found the attention of everybody here (i.e. The Ladies) attracted by Master Payne—the new new [*sic*] American Roscius, as Mr. L. South elegantly and forcibly expresses it. He performed here eight successive nights (Sunday excepted) which produced him more than twice as many hundred dollars. I was at his benefit, when about one thousand tickets were sold—and several Ladies condescended (if the ascension can be so termed) to sit in the Gallery—'Bating his voice and figure, he is a most admirable actor. To compensate for his absence there is to be a Ball every night this week.<sup>82</sup>

Mordecai's letter reveals his familiarity with theatre-going. Members of the family were shareholders in the Richmond playhouse, which had been co-founded by another Jewish settler, Joseph Darmstadt. And the family had been exchanging letters that reveal them as educated critics of the drama for more than a decade.<sup>83</sup>

Later that same year, Rachel wrote to her sister Ellen, referencing Samuel's earlier letter. She was traveling to Petersburg, Virginia, and had once again encountered Payne, who was still touring in the South:

In the evening it was proposed that we should go to the Theatre as Master Payne, the young Roscius of whom Sam once wrote, was to make his first appearance in this place, in the character of young Norval. His performance is really elegant, and discovers surprising powers, especially when you reflect that they are displayed by a boy of seventeen. The company boasts some other good performers, but fatigue rendered me incapable of enjoying it so entirely as I otherwise should have done.<sup>84</sup>

Subsequent letters between Samuel, Rachel, and Ellen discuss Shakespeare, Madame Vestris, and the merits of various performers appearing at the Richmond playhouse.<sup>85</sup> As the Mordecai's letters reveal, while their mother might have labeled them "Wandering Jews" back in 1791, roughly twenty years later the family had not only come to consider themselves as settled citizens, they had also cultivated more sophisticated tastes than one might expect from residents of Warrenton, North Carolina. Descriptions of their relatives' homes in Richmond "convey the impression of opulence," according to Berman, including the home of their uncle Samuel Myers, whose house boasted "lofty back piazzas" with mantelpieces of "grey marble with graceful fluted columns and delicately carved woodwork, painted white, reaching nearly to the ceiling."<sup>86</sup> Berman describes an 1810 Gilbert Stuart portrait of Myers as portraying "a man who had arrived."<sup>87</sup> Rachel and Ellen Mordecai were raised by their uncle Samuel Myers (after their mother's death and before their father's remarriage), and their exposure to this kind of cosmopolitan sophistication had a lasting impact. Yet the Mordecais and their associates were also aware that the circles in which they moved were "provincial" compared to more culturally advanced cities such as New York or Philadelphia. As Solomon Jacobs complained in 1817, "Richmond is as dull as I ever saw it—there is no stir—no bustle—either in business or anything else"<sup>88</sup> And when Samuel Mordecai wrote his history of Richmond in 1856, *Richmond in By-Gone Days*, he described the failed efforts of early settlers to create an Academy of Fine Arts, plans that were "far ahead of the times," as were attempts to sustain pleasure gardens modeled on those of London, which eventually reverted to "thorns and thistles."<sup>89</sup>

## FAMILY TIES

When does a “knot of dramatic encounter” reveal a network? In Mr. Solomon’s case, many of his interactions suggest that he either failed to build a sufficiently powerful network to forward his career or that he labored on a much smaller scale, trying to milk his Masonic connections (however limited) or the comparatively small world of American professional theatre to transition from city to city. Yet while the “knots” in Solomon’s story may be dense, the threads connecting them remain tenuous. By contrast, Payne’s passage through the Mordecai family’s letters in 1810 reveals both the strength and *visibility* of their local networks. Samuel’s correspondence in particular reveals his constant engagement with individuals beyond the small local Jewish community of Richmond, and the letters of various relatives and associates point to intellectual, social, and cultural aspirations that could not be achieved in Richmond’s limited sphere. Yet, as the Mordecais’ early history documents, however confined or confining these networks may have seemed at times, they were crucial to sustaining religious and financial connections among the nation’s Jewish population. As that population expanded, what assumptions did non-Jews make about Jewish networks, and how did those assumptions manifest themselves in either daily interactions or crisis situations?

I have already discussed various aspects of Mordecai Noah’s career in earlier chapters, focusing on Noah’s representations of Jewish identity both on and off the stage, and on the personal attacks he endured because of his Jewish heritage. Noah operated within numerous, highly complex networks of local and national politics, religious and charitable communities, and professional theatre. He was generally regarded (at least by the end of his career) as a worthy advocate for Jewish causes, a pillar of the American Jewish community, and an exemplar of that community’s growing force in American society. In this instance, however, I turn to Noah to examine what his non-Jewish critics saw as the *failure* of his Jewish compatriots to support him at what might have been a turning point in his career, and one that might have made a substantial difference in the history of nineteenth-century American theatre.

In 1823, Noah found himself embroiled in a libel suit with a man named Silvanus Miller. It unfolded as part of Noah’s first (and apparently last) effort to become a theatre manager, and the incident earned him the epithet of political turncoat. While libel suits were not uncommon among nineteenth-

century newspaper editors, the cause of this particular suit was unusual. In 1818, Noah had received a letter from a southern theatre manager offering him the opportunity to become co-manager of six southern playhouses. Having long harbored theatrical ambitions, Noah was tempted. Had he been able to seize the opportunity, he would have become the most prominent Jewish theatre manager in the country. The stumbling block was the \$10,000 buy-in. In a puzzling move, Noah approached a supporter of his political foe DeWitt Clinton, promising that in return for a loan of \$10,000 from Clinton's allies he would resign from the newspaper business. This would, he emphasized, eliminate a major source of public opposition to Clinton's upcoming campaign. Unfortunately for Noah, his rivals spread the story of his offer to turn on his own party. His enemies lambasted him for trying to broker such a dishonest arrangement. Noah retaliated by insulting Miller in his newspaper. The ensuing disputes resulted in a libel suit against Noah.

In a peculiar twist during the trial, Noah's enemies speculated publicly about why he had not asked his "coreligionists" to support his theatre project. One witness at the trial testified that Noah *had* indeed planned to secure support from Jewish citizens in the South to help him repay his loan.<sup>90</sup> The testimony suggests that some non-Jews did not perceive the distinctions among diverse Jewish American populations or the intellectual and spiritual schisms that challenged Jewish communities throughout the nation and simply assumed that Jewish Americans operated as a unit. Indeed, as Noah's case illuminates, many Gentile Americans saw only the general growth of the country's Jewish population, which was expanding by the tens of thousands in the first decades of the nineteenth century. This expansion had renewed anxieties concerning the Jewish presence in America. Indeed, only three years before Noah's 1823 libel trial, a group of Gentiles had founded the Society for Ameliorating the Condition of the Jews, a colonization movement to relocate those Jews who would convert to Christianity to the western part of New York.<sup>91</sup> Ostensibly a religious organization, the society also sought to stem the influx of Jews into major urban centers and to mitigate the impact of Jewish culture on Gentile American society. By the year of Noah's trial in 1823 they had begun purchasing lands for the project.

When the society had launched in 1820, an outraged author calling himself "An Israelite" published *Israel Vindicated: Being a Refutation of the Calumnies Propagated respecting the Jewish Nation: in which the objects and views of the American Society for Ameliorating the Condition of the Jews are investigated*. The book (written in an epistolary form) gives an energetic defense of

Jewish life against Gentile evangelism.<sup>92</sup> Jewish Americans complained that the society preached offensive doctrines about Judaism and that its members invaded Jewish homes, trying to browbeat Jews into converting. Jews demanded protection from the government, reminding the public repeatedly of the nation's promise to separate church and state.<sup>93</sup>

His own personal difficulties and thwarted ambitions aside, Noah watched the persecution of Jews abroad and at home with growing trepidation, and he shared, albeit in a different way, his fellow Americans' concerns about Jewish immigrants in America. Eventually he proposed the creation of a Jewish refuge within the United States, the settlement of Ararat that would allow Jewish "wanderers" from across Europe to find refuge in a community named for the resting place of Noah's Ark. In a supremely theatrical moment, Noah borrowed the *Richard III* costume from the Park Theatre for his role in the 1825 dedication of Ararat, and he appeared at the ceremony decked in a velvet, fur-trimmed robe and ceremonial chain, with a scroll in his hand (figure 5).

Styling himself a "Grand Judge of Israel," Noah presided over the event with pride. Yet in a telling political cartoon titled "Departure of the Israelites for the Yanky city of refuge," depicting Noah recruiting settlers for his prospective colony, he appears as a tiny and ludicrous figure on top of an ark on a mound labeled "Ararat," holding a flag in one hand and the typical pawnbroker's symbol of three golden balls in the other (see figure 6).<sup>94</sup> The European Jewish refugees who pass in front of him are dressed as ragged peddlers, even though they have money bags slung over their shoulders.<sup>95</sup> Their faces are caricatured with the same hooked noses and sly looks that proliferated in nineteenth-century literary and visual culture, representations that had, as Wendy Woloson argues, "normalized the archetype of the Jew as 'half-comic, half-hideous,' with massive noses and grasping, greedy hands."<sup>96</sup> With the money they carry, they are clearly envisioned as part of a Jewish financial network, one that American authors and playwrights seized on in their depictions of Jewish brokers and itinerant peddlers.<sup>97</sup> It was not, however, the type of network calculated to endear them to non-Jewish communities.

Noah's Ararat venture failed for a variety of reasons, but while he may have abandoned his hopes of establishing a separate refuge for Jewish Americans within the United States, he never slackened his efforts to support charitable organizations that united members of the Jewish community. For example, on November 13, 1849, almost twenty-five years after the failed Ar-





Fig. 5. Watercolor of Mordecai Noah by George Caitlin. (The Library Company of Philadelphia.)



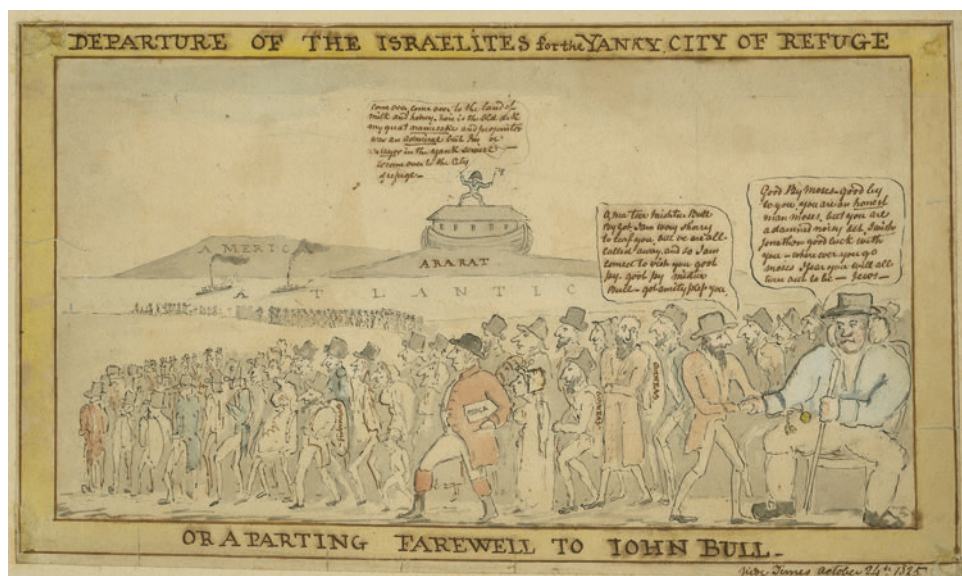


Fig. 6. Watercolor of “Departure of the Israelites for the Yanky City of Refuge.” (The Library Company of Philadelphia.)

arat project, Noah was among the guests of honor at a celebratory dinner of the New York and the German Hebrew Benevolent Societies. Isaac Leeser’s *The Occident* hailed Noah as the “worthy presiding officer, for many years, of the Hebrew Benevolent Society.”<sup>98</sup>

Noah also continued to envision theatre as a crucial site for Jewish Americans to engage with their non-Jewish counterparts. His patriotic plays mapped “wanderers” from overseas into the American landscape and American history. But he also understood the importance of Jewish audience members networking *within* the playhouse. For example, in an 1830 letter to his wife, he writes, “I have just left the Theatre where I met all the politicians and heard all the Washington news—They express great hopes that all may yet go strait [*sic*].”<sup>99</sup> Noah’s description of the playhouse as a site to exchange news and gossip appears entirely consistent with the culture of nineteenth-century playgoing. It also offers some indication of the ease with which Jewish American audiences members networked among non-Jews. In chapter 1, I cited Noah’s presence in Searle’s 1822 portrait of the Park Theatre audience. Noah’s letter to his wife supports the suggestion that the proximity of Noah to his political and literary colleagues was no mere conceit of

the artist, but a very real depiction of Noah's daily experience. Like his stage counterparts, however, Noah could never be sure when a seemingly friendly reception might turn cold or when his Jewish heritage would be used to shift his status from insider to outsider again.

## OLD FRIENDS AND MAD WAGS

Noah's uncle, actor-manager Aaron Phillips, received more sympathetic treatment from audiences than his nephew over the course of his career (perhaps not surprisingly, since he courted less controversy), but his Jewish heritage still colored the ways in which critics described his work. Before becoming manager of Philadelphia's Arch Street Theatre in 1829, Phillips had tried his fortunes as a performer in western Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Louisiana, and Kentucky, with moderate success.<sup>100</sup> Though he wandered throughout much of his career, Phillips came from an established Jewish family well-networked into the larger Philadelphia community, which also seems to have shaped the reception that some local critics gave his performances.<sup>101</sup>

In 1828, the year before his return to Philadelphia, Phillips was in search of a more permanent position, and a letter he wrote to the proprietors of Boston's Federal Street Theatre reveals not only Phillips's efforts to manage his reputation but presents a brief chronicle of his most recent travels. On July 8, 1828, he wrote to the proprietors from Portsmouth in response to an advertisement for someone to "superintend the stage" for the coming season. Phillips offered his bona fides:

My qualifications for such a situation I believe are pretty generally well known, having with much credit to myself and satisfaction to my employers filled that situation in several of the most respectable theatres in the United States. I was the original stage manager of the Chatham Theatre, and may safely claim the credit of having established the reputation of that theatre. You are also aware of how my theatre in Salem was conducted last winter, and I can refer you for my ability to the most respectable managers in NY, to certificates, which I have in my possession from the proprietors of the Chatham Theatre (since dead), and for my responsibility and private moral deportment to M.M. Noah Esq., New York.

I have many testimonials also in my possession of the satisfaction given to the Proprietors of the Salem Theatre as well as the citizenry generally by the manner in which I introduced theatricals to their town and the system which I preserved in their continuation. It might also be an object by a Mr. Lavin and the Salem Theatre next winter which would not interfere with my duties in Boston, and probably eventually to mutual advantage.

I have not been so successful in my excursion eastward as I could have wished, and the anxiety occasioned by the risque [*sic*] of profit & losses makes me wish for a certainty the ensuing winter.

I do not know if you are supplied with an actor in my line of business, that is in the first line of comic old men or in other words Mr. Kilney's line of business. But I would have no objection to engage as manager and actor, or as stage manager only.

I must ask your confidence in this application as should there be no arrangement entered into, it might injure me in the theatrical walk or manager on my own account—which I should most likely continue.<sup>102</sup>

Phillips's confession that he had "not been so successful" in his travels, and his wish for a more stable situation highlight not only the uncertain nature of the actor-manager's lifestyle, but also Phillips's understanding of how fragile the reputation of a wandering performer might be. His request that the managers apply to his nephew (Noah) for assurances of his probity and his plea that the proprietors keep his application secret hint that Phillips was perhaps not as confident in establishing himself in a new city as the opening of his letter might suggest. His assurance that he both introduced and "preserved" theatrical entertainments in Salem indicates that he had learned that his role as manager was *not* to bring in startling innovations, but to acclimate himself to the tastes of local audiences. Perhaps most tellingly, he makes no personal appeal to the Federal Street proprietors, underscoring that his network of theatrical, familial, or business connections did not extend as far as Boston. No record survives of the proprietors' response to Phillips, but apparently they did *not* grant him the lease, and the following year he left Massachusetts and resurfaced in Philadelphia to manage the Arch Street Theatre.

Durang's history of the Philadelphia stage describes Phillips as "a native of Philadelphia, and for many years connected with our various theatres, both as actor and manager, [who] had been acting at the West, doing trag-

edy with all his might."<sup>103</sup> Durang's treatment of Phillips is revealing. He frequently includes actors' biographies in his work, and in Phillips's case he claims him as a "native" and a member of "our" theatres, signaling a degree of acceptance and ownership. Moreover, his accounts of Phillips's homecoming to Philadelphia cast Phillips in the light of a traveler (or prodigal?) returned, rather than a perpetual wanderer.

Phillips's stewardship of the Arch Street Theatre was greeted with anticipation. He promised to drive the prostitutes out of the third tier and to establish a wholesome atmosphere for his patrons, innovations that would have been welcome to his middle-class patrons. Yet like his fictional dramatic counterpart Sheva (the "benevolent Hebrew"), Phillips was often portrayed as being too kindly for his own good, and, according to Durang's history, his "rainbow hopes" were soon dashed. One 1858 chronicle of the Arch Street Theatre notes wryly the lamentable fate of the playhouse: "Mr. Aaron Phillips undertook the management, and opened it on the 15th of April, 1829, and closed it in tortures on the 25th, a glorious reign of ten days!"<sup>104</sup> In a reversal of the familiar stereotype of the Jewish businessman ruining his colleagues, Phillips was despoiled by others:

Our old friend Aaron really deserved a better fate than that which ended in disaster to his management in 1829 and '30. In fact, from various annoying and embarrassing circumstances, he became bewildered, lost all stability of nerve and action. The management was literally taken out of his hands by Walton and Archer, and the revolving satellites about *their* power [*sic*]. The consequence was that Phillips was ruined, and *they*, the *cause*, did not better their condition. They wanted the lease themselves.<sup>105</sup>

The kindly (if condescending) reference to "our old friend" suggests that even if Phillips could not parlay the commodity of his local community connections into dollars, he had at least translated it into goodwill.

By contrast, Aaron Phillips's nephew Moses Phillips (known as "Nosey" Phillips for his prominent nose) was often rebuked for his questionable business dealings in his various wanderings throughout the early national theatre circuit.<sup>106</sup> According to a chronicle of the Albany stage, which described him as "one of the children of Israel" and "as mad a wag as we shall never look on his like again," Moses generally left debts wherever he went. The author observes ruefully, "He was the sole author and inventor of many shrewd and curious dodges," and whenever Moses undertook a project,

"somebody was the sufferer." The chronicle offers curious anecdotes of Moses's adventures. In one instance, Moses had accrued substantial debt while working in Rhode Island. He fled his creditors and made his way to New York where, according to history, he found a former creditor and persuaded the man to press his suit. Thus when Moses's Rhode Island lenders came clamoring for their money, they found him already in jail for debt and thus immune to their claims!<sup>107</sup>

Moses Phillips became notorious for his chicanery. In an outrageous incident in 1842—gleefully repeated in the *Albany Chronicle*, Durang's history, and Danforth Marble's reminiscences—Moses masqueraded as his uncle when corresponding about a contract, then tried to hold the manager to the deal when he arrived on site. Marble's account of the exchange between the appalled stage manager, the duplicitous Moses, and Caldwell (the theatre manager) reads like a classic cross-talk act:

CALDWELL: "There's a mistake here sir."

MOSES: "Where sir?"

CALDWELL: "You're not wanted sir."

MOSES: "Not wanted?"

CALDWELL: "Not wanted, sir."

MOSES: "Not this week, perhaps, sir?"

CALDWELL: "Not this month, sir!"

MOSES: "Oh, full company, eh? Good! Next month, I suppose?"

CALDWELL: "No sir, nor *during this or the next season sir!*"

MOSES: "I don't understand you."

CALDWELL: "Shall I speak louder?"<sup>108</sup>

According to Durang's account, "Moses, not having the fear or dread of a violation of a Decalogue as given to his great ancestor on Mount Sinai, he Moses, knowing the agent's mistake, and that his relative Aaron was a real Simon Pure, nevertheless signed and sealed articles by which he undertook to act the comedy old men [at a theatre in New Orleans for Mr. Caldwell]."<sup>109</sup> Once he arrived in New Orleans and the trick became apparent, Phillips refused to yield: "No; Moses, with the pertinacity of his great brother Shylock, stood upon his bond, or the pound of flesh, and he got his \$30 per week."<sup>110</sup> Durang adds that Caldwell was so furious at Phillips's trick that he "exiled" him to a little theatre in Mobile. Durang's language throughout this account of Phillips's career is extraordinarily revealing, and

it mirrors the casual observation in the Albany history that Moses was “one of the children of Israel.” In an instant, Moses’s dishonest behavior becomes emblematic of “Jewishness,” echoing that most famous and despised of all Jewish characters, Shylock. And while Durang might or might not have realized the significance of his word choice in describing Phillips’s subsequent banishment to Alabama as an “exile,” it would certainly have resonated with Jewish American readers. Like his biblical namesake, and like the outcast figure of medieval legend, Moses Phillips’s transgressions resulted in a prolonged period of wandering through an inhospitable land.

Yet accounts of these episodes in Moses Phillips’s career appear in national newspapers as comic incidents, almost as if the sharp-dealing Jew had morphed into the trickster Yankee.<sup>111</sup> Even the anti-Semitic jibes directed against Moses Phillips have a kind of “insider” quality. While insulting, they seem to lack real venom; Moses almost seems “in” on the joke, a clever prankster whose antics were part of a deliberate pose. One further knot of dramatic encounter described in the Albany records suggests that Moses *may* have deliberately cultivated a stereotypical Jewish persona as part of his public performance.

During an appearance with Fog and Stickney’s Circus in Cincinnati, Moses was “enacting the clown,” riding around and telling “Joe Miller” jokes while on horseback.<sup>112</sup> Suddenly the horse bolted and began to race madly around the ring. The crowd cheered, “Go it Nosey!” Unable to keep his saddle, Moses flew over the horse’s head and into the crowd, accidentally hitting a sailor in the eye and losing his “skull cap” in the process. While the sailor complained that “the fellow with the big handle on his mug [big nose]” was the worst clown he had ever seen, Moses beat a hasty retreat, “as his tights had come down.” While it is unlikely that the “skull cap” described in this scene was in fact a kippah, it seems *possible* that Moses’s “clown” persona may have been easily conflated with an exaggerated Jewish character type, particularly since some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century images of Shylock show the actor playing him wearing a kippah.<sup>113</sup> The audience certainly knew Moses as “Nosey”—calling attention to the most stereotypically Jewish feature on his face—and his Jewish heritage seems to have been common knowledge. *Did* Moses exert his “Jewishness” for comic effect, telling “Jewish” Joe Miller jokes in a costume that might have gestured to familiar representations of Shylock? The snippets of anecdotes scattered throughout the historical record do not allow the theatre historian to offer a definitive answer about Moses’s choices, but the implications are tempting. The parallels

with the “runaway” ads cited at the beginning of the chapter are also striking (such as Jews “addicted” to dishonest behavior), though, in contrast to those advertisements, the apparent absence of anxiety or fear on behalf of those observing Moses’s antics also seems noteworthy. Moses plays the comic Jew, but on his own terms, and to both cosmopolitan and popular audiences able to appreciate the subtleties of his joke.

“Our old friend Phillips” and his “mad wag” of a nephew wandered across the American theatrical landscape for the better part of two decades. While neither Aaron nor Moses was credited with any specific cosmopolitan wisdom, they were still able to transform their wanderings into a kind of humorous mythology that secured them a place in American theatre history.

From the endless wanderings of Mr. Solomon to the homecomings of Aaron and Nosey Phillips, the American theatre witnessed a shift in the ways in which Jewish American performers engaged with both local and national audiences. Yet many of the responses to their work remain tinged with a condescending tone that, while it connotes a certain degree of tolerance, falls short of full acceptance. Assumptions about “Jewish networks” lingered in the popular imagination as Noah’s libel trial and the cartoon of Jewish moneylenders flocking to American shores suggest. These perceptions persisted notwithstanding the attempts of Jewish artists and audience members to deploy their cosmopolitan sensibilities to counteract stereotypes of the Wandering Jew. But despite the repeated reminders that Jews remained strangers in a strange land, trying to conjure a sense of “home” through performances of culture and faith, I do not conflate a longing for home with a wish for assimilation into Gentile American culture. It would remain for the next generation of wanderers to imprint their cosmopolitan tastes on the rapidly developing theatre before appropriating and challenging the image of the Wandering Jew.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### *“For They Abide with Us”*

#### Forging Communities on and off the Stage

I arrived in Savannah [Georgia] at 1 AM—I never before knew what it is to be a stranger. . . . Here I am in a new land, & have an opportunity of being what I will.

—DIARY OF JOSEPH LYONS, APRIL 29, 1833<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Lyons was a member of an established Jewish American family, but his 1833 diary entry cited above hints at the sense of freedom he and so many other Jews anticipated when they emigrated to America from Europe or embarked from settled East Coast communities toward unknown western territories. The promise that they could openly express or reinvent their identities must have been tantalizing.<sup>2</sup> Stephen Birmingham has suggested that as generations of Jewish families felt themselves more settled, some aspired to be known “for their cultivation, breeding, good manners, and good works.”<sup>3</sup> The mid-nineteenth century certainly witnessed an upsurge in the formation of Jewish charitable and social organizations, from orphan asylums to amateur dramatic societies, as Jewish Americans established more public spaces for civic engagement. But how to use a process of reinvention to forge a newer, stronger community that retained the familiar while it embraced the new? How to showcase cosmopolitan or “foreign” tastes in a landscape hovering between settled and frontier?

This chapter examines how comparatively isolated groups of Jewish American actors and audiences consolidated their authority and image, and how they arrived at a mid-century tipping point when the number of Jewish or Jewish-descended performers reached a critical mass in the culture. Families such as the Nathans and the Wallacks built dynasties that stretched across the national theatre landscape, and Mordecai Noah’s son, Manuel Noah, established himself as both a playwright and a champion of Jewish rights out in California. This chapter also explores adventures of

various Jewish artists or theatregoers whose journeys reflected the status of Jewish Americans in the national imagination. These investigations include actor-manager William Dinneford's misguided efforts at reinvention; theatre patron Edward Rosewater's almost compulsive play-going in tiny frontier cities across the Southwest as he taught himself both English and a new trade; and the much-beloved, eccentric figure of "Emperor" Joshua Norton, who not only became a fixture in the San Francisco playhouse, but whose notable peculiarities provided fodder for the stage as well. I juxtapose the singular adventures of these figures with community-based artistic projects launched by a new generation of young Jewish men and women who wanted more than simply sitting in a playhouse audience. These amateur dramatic associations affirmed Jewish Americans' participation in the national culture while simultaneously underscoring the growth and strength of Jewish communities across the country.

Throughout this chapter I also return to a question I have explored explicitly or implicitly elsewhere in this study: What role did an artist's Jewish identity play in shaping audiences' reception of particular performers or particular ventures? It is tempting, but dangerous, to ascribe every instance of rejection faced by a Jewish American artist to anti-Semitism. Instead, it may be helpful to invoke Marvin Carlson's concept of "ghosting," querying the extent to which antebellum Jewish artists were haunted not only by their own pasts but by inherited traditions of anti-Semitic stage characters that reached back hundreds of years. Those traditions, which had established well-worn grooves in American popular culture, made it all too easy for spectators or critics to lapse into a careless shorthand, describing Jews as Shylocks, Shevas, or Isaacs, however little resemblance those figures bore to reality. In this chapter I point to various Jewish artists whose Jewish heritage seemingly did not matter to their audiences until suddenly, for some reason, triggered by a political or personal incident, it *did*.<sup>4</sup> Those moments of rupture illuminate instances of progress as well as failure in Jewish Americans' efforts to move beyond facile definitions of what it meant to be a "Jew" in the United States.

### "A DASHING ISRAELITE"

Unlike some of the other Jewish artists in the United States who relied on family or community networks, William Dinneford came to America with

few connections. He left a prospective law career in England to marry a minor Jewish actress named Isabelle Mordecai and begin life as an actor-manager in America. Dinneford, who altered his name to take up the stage, had a challenging time fitting into some of his new communities. He seems to have anticipated that with his change of country and career he would have the chance to reinvent himself, but his constant shifts of profession, location, and persona apparently troubled some spectators, who viewed it as a sign of unsteadiness and even untrustworthiness.

Before launching into the story of Dinneford's two most notable failures, I offer a brief biography of his wife, who seems to have shared both his travels and his many reversals of fortune. Prior to her marriage, Isabelle Mordecai had been a performer at Drury Lane known primarily for her dancing. She immigrated to America with Dinneford in 1821 and they performed with theatre companies and circuses in New York, Washington, DC (where she danced in honor of Lafayette's visit), and elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> In 1828 she announced her retirement from the stage. Five years later found her ensconced as the supervisor of the Ladies' Drawing Room at Dinneford's ice cream, pastry, and tea shop in Providence. Sometime in early November of 1835 she died of what the New York *Evening Post* described as an "apoplectick [*sic*] fit."<sup>6</sup> During her stage career her name seldom appeared in theatrical reviews beyond general mentions of her being "pleasing," suggesting that she was like so many working actresses of the early nineteenth century who filled the theatrical ranks and spent their lives on tour: appreciated at the time by audiences but leaving little lasting impression of their work. Still, her name adds that of yet another Jewish actress to the comparatively small list of female Jewish performers working on the early national stage.

In contrast to Isabelle's relative inconspicuousness, Dinneford made quite an impression on his contemporaries. Durang's nineteenth-century history of the Philadelphia stage, for example, describes Dinneford as a "dashing Israelite."<sup>7</sup> His series of posts as a lottery director, auctioneer, actor, theatre owner, bookkeeper, and restaurant manager fit the contemporary stereotype of the Wandering Jew; at the same time they also suggest a man eager to reinvent himself in new settings. Dinneford's travels took him up and down the East Coast and as far afield as Panama, where he died making his way further west.<sup>8</sup> While Dinneford's career was indeed a wide-ranging one, I focus narrowly on two episodes: his attempt to establish himself at Boston's Federal Street Theatre; and a particular incident at the theatre in Providence, Rhode Island, that illuminates both the struggles he faced in

his own professional life and those larger issues of belonging faced by many Jewish Americans of the same era.

On March 28, 1829, William Dinneford purchased \$1,000 worth of shares in the Federal Street Theatre. Two months earlier, on January 31, he had written to one of the theatre's representatives, William Thompson, declaring, "Although I retired from the stage about a year since with a determination that should be for good, yet still I feel a desire to try it once more." He had heard the Federal Street might be for rent after a particularly disastrous season in 1828, and he promised that with care the theatre might, "yet be restor'd to its pristine state."<sup>9</sup> Dinneford's correspondence with the Federal Street proprietors continued for the next few months, and all seemed to be going well. Thompson assured Dinneford that the "Theatre is now uncommonly well provided with a large stock of scenery much of which is entirely new, & of a valuable & useful kind. Has an extensive & rich wardrobe, a great variety of music, & an extensive collection of plays which will no doubt be leased with the building, the same all belonging to the proprietors."<sup>10</sup> In a letter dated February 27, 1829, Dinneford sent his approval of the news that new shares were being sold in order to redecorate the theatre, affirming that "the idea is a good one." He cautioned, however, that the proposed plan to give free admission to stockholders was, "in my opinion, decidedly bad."<sup>11</sup>

Despite this minor disagreement, things proceeded smoothly. Dinneford asked that the Federal Street proprietors commission an artist to redecorate the playhouse while he secured contracts for performers for the new season. He produced a bond from a Rhode Island merchant named John Paine, guaranteeing that Paine would back Dinneford for \$3,000 to \$5,000 if needed, in order to secure his lease on the theatre.<sup>12</sup> Then on March 16, 1829, the negotiations apparently took a turn for the worse. Dinneford wrote an angry letter to Thompson:

It regretted me much to find that any idle report should have made the least inroad upon your credulity. I can only say that it is utterly false. The report has been propagated by some designing villain to work out his own purposes, and if you will consult Mr. Finn upon the question he put to me in relation to a certain previous manager, it is more than likely something might be traced to him. The contract I have made with you is a fair and honorable one, at least so considered by me, and I will not suffer any innovation to be made in that contract, in consequence of false & malicious reports—it has already retarded the execution of that

contract which certainly ought to have been done long since, and a plea is now set forth that one of the trustees is absent. I know of none but you and Mr. Hood, and you both told me in the presence of Mr. Buckingham that you were duly authorized to ratify any agreement that might be made between us. You called a meeting of the stockholders, gain'd their sanction, afterwards waited upon me and concluded verbally an honorable contract between man and man—that contract I shall honorably fulfill, and I demand the same dealing at your hands. The lease I wish to have drawn out as clear & concise as possible that there may be no after misunderstanding and so long as it is consistent with equity, I care not how binding.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, the letter that ignited Dinneford's anger does not appear to have survived, so the exact accusations that were made against him by a "designing villain" remain a mystery. The *implication* based on Dinneford's protests is that he was cheating the proprietors. Dinneford's letter also alludes to untoward delays in finalizing the contract, an understandable complaint given that he was supposed to take up the lease of the theatre later that summer and considerable work remained to be done to fill out the company and complete the renovations to the playhouse.

On May 1, 1829, the proprietors summoned Dinneford to a meeting. Thompson hedged in divulging the reason for the gathering: "The communication referred to was rec'd a few days since, and it is necessary it should be acted upon at once. I know nothing further of the subject, and am therefore unable to give you any particulars of the intentions of the Prop. in appointing this committee. A union of the two interests is spoken of, but on what terms I do not know."<sup>14</sup>

What was afoot was nothing less than a plan by the proprietors to violate their contract with Dinneford and transfer the lease to the managers of the Tremont Street Theatre, who had requested a three-year rental on the property. Not surprisingly, Dinneford protested vociferously. One of the shareholders (named Bradbury) urged Dinneford to relinquish the struggle. Dinneford had no allies and no advocates to speak on his behalf in Boston. His reputation had already been attacked during the negotiations. Moreover, as Bradbury warned him, the theatre was virtually guaranteed to lose money throughout the coming season. Bradbury predicted that Dinneford would wind up more than \$15,000 in debt by the end of the season if he persisted.

Dinneford claimed that either the Federal Street Theatre proprietors or the Tremont Theatre managers should compensate him for his trouble. He initially demanded \$3,000. Bradbury replied on July 1 that "The terms proposed by you in regard to the lease of the theatre are so far from my ideas of what they should be, that I lose no time on saying that they cannot be agreed to."<sup>15</sup> Dinneford lowered his asking price to \$2,000, "which you can probably well afford to pay."<sup>16</sup> He also expressed his outrage at the proprietors' treachery, declaring that he felt a "deep sense of injustice which I consider you have manifested towards me in the course things have taken. The moment the proposition was made your faces ought to have been set against it. You individually and collectively pledged yourselves to exert your interest and influence in my undertaking & to forward the interest of the theatre." He protested that "I cannot assent to transfer of the lease unless I am in some way indemnified."<sup>17</sup> Unhappily for Dinneford, the next letter he received on July 17 informed him that the Federal Street proprietors had concluded their deal with the Tremont Theatre management and that Dinneford would have to "make the best terms [he] could with them."<sup>18</sup>

Dinneford's treatment at the hands of the Federal Street proprietors demonstrates no overt anti-Semitism, and it is impossible to know (without additional evidence) whether anti-Semitic sentiment shaped the theatre owners' response to Dinneford. Certainly they had been willing to lease the theatre until they heard "something" about his reputation that changed their minds. Dinneford and his wife were known to be of Jewish descent, but Dinneford was also described as handsome and a "peculiar favorite" because of his "varied accomplishments" and "agreeable ways."<sup>19</sup> For all his charm, however, Dinneford also encountered some of the same accusations as his contemporary, Moses "Nosey" Phillips. Colleagues described him as a "ripe adventurer," hinting that he enjoyed taking risks, perhaps with others' money. In addition to running theatres in Providence, New York, New Orleans, and Philadelphia, Dinneford also established himself in various cities as a temperance speaker, an equestrian performer, a science lecturer in zoological gardens, an innkeeper, and a lottery and exchange broker in Rhode Island, a variety of occupations that may have raised questions about his steadiness.<sup>20</sup> His adventurous lifestyle led him into scrapes as he faced accusations about dishonest practices in his brokerage business (a common charge against Jewish brokers, as Wendy Woloson notes<sup>21</sup>). Moreover, unlike many other sites in which he established his various businesses, among the significant cities on the eastern seaboard, Boston lacked a substantial Jewish popula-

tion until well into the nineteenth century. Boston had been home to Jewish theatregoers and theatre shareholders from the time of Moses Michael Hays' investments in the first Federal Street Theatre in 1794, but the Massachusetts Jewish community was comparatively small and did not launch its own synagogue until 1843.<sup>22</sup> Thus even if Dinneford had wanted to play on the sympathies of his fellow Jews in combating the slurs against him, or even if he had hoped for their support in his venture, Jewish Bostonians did not make up a sufficiently powerful force in the community. Disappointed by his experience in Boston but undaunted, Dinneford undertook a new theatrical experiment, one that was also destined to end in failure and one that would highlight the challenges Jewish settlers continued to face in reinventing themselves or their surroundings.

A year after the Federal Street playhouse kerfuffle in 1830, Dinneford assumed the lease of the Providence Theatre in Rhode Island. As was customary, he undertook extensive renovations to the playhouse before reopening it. And as he had done with other theatres he had remodeled in the past (in New York, Philadelphia, and elsewhere), he promised that "no expense" would be spared and that "an eminent artist" had been engaged and "the scenery [would] be entirely new."<sup>23</sup> Part of Dinneford's plans for improving the space included removing the theatre's old drop curtain, a panoramic painting of Providence by John Worrall that had been in place since 1812 (fig. 7). Much to Dinneford's dismay, the Providence audience protested his decision, demanding their old curtain back. Dinneford tried to reason with the community, emphasizing the beauty of the new curtain and its suitability for a modern playhouse, but to no avail. In the end, he bowed to popular demand and restored the faded drop curtain that depicted the city's landscape.

The trouble began on May 20, 1829, when Rhode Island's *Republican Herald* announced that Dinneford was taking subscriptions for stock in a new theatre. Dinneford released the plans for the interior and the exterior to the public, a practice that helped to drum up interest among potential subscribers and allowed local citizens to begin envisioning the newly renovated building as part of their familiar landscape. Nineteenth-century playhouses were meant to serve as local showplaces, spotlighting civic pride through majestic architecture and lavish interior decorations. Dinneford's Providence playhouse competed with area circuses and other popular entertainments, but it also drew audiences from as far away as Boston who traveled down by steamboat to see the latest plays.

John Worrall's drop curtain, started around 1808 or 1809, was first dis-



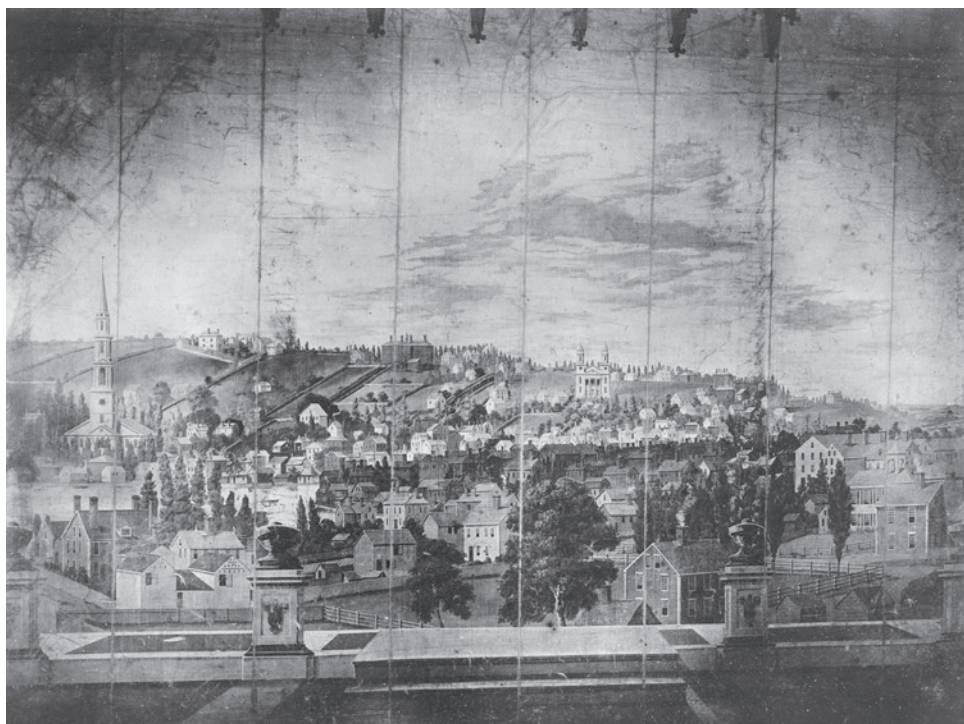


Fig. 7. Providence Theatre Drop Curtain painted by John Worrall. (Courtesy the Rhode Island Historical Society [RHi X3 2570].)

played in the Providence Theatre on July 8, 1812. According to the reminiscences of Walter Danforth (later mayor of Providence), the drop curtain initially drew large audiences to the theatre (and at higher-than-average ticket prices). Worrall was a well-known Boston scenic painter who had spent several theatre seasons in Rhode Island, where he had made numerous sketches and studies of the Providence landscape in order to produce the drop. The 21' x 23' painting (currently housed at the Rhode Island Historical Society) shows the East Side of Providence, and, as the journal of the Rhode Island Historical Society notes, it is the *only* surviving large-scale image from that early period that shows the landscape before the majority of the trees had been cut down.<sup>24</sup>

The original Providence drop curtain reflected popular tastes for pan-

oramas of both familiar and exotic locales. It also played into the trend of adorning playhouses with symbolic decorations that affirmed local or national loyalties. For example, in her examination of the 1820s rivalry between the two Washington, DC, playhouses (known as the National Theatre and the Washington Theatre), AnnMarie Saunders writes that theatre managers who adorned playhouses with murals and elaborate scenes depicting the history of the Revolution triumphed over managers who invested in more "neutral" (albeit splendid) décor.<sup>25</sup> As Francis Trollope proclaimed, "If America in her vastness, her immense natural resources, and her remote grandeur, would be less imitative, she would be infinitely more picturesque and interesting."<sup>26</sup> Perhaps *that* was the central conflict at the heart of the Providence drop curtain brouhaha: Dinneford, a London-born theatre manager with a wide experience of touring in America's largest cities, wanted his playhouse to replicate the elegant designs of more cosmopolitan theatres. The Providence audience wanted something "less imitative, more picturesque, and interesting!"

By the time Dinneford took over the theatre and began his remodeling, the popular curtain was (apparently) no longer in mint condition.<sup>27</sup> According to Dinneford, the old drop curtain "had sustained such additional injury during the past winter that it could not be safely used."<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Providence audiences found arguments about safety and elegance unpersuasive. Soon after the ill-fated 1830 season, Dinneford left Providence for ventures in other cities.<sup>29</sup>

While the "drop curtain debacle" may seem like a trivial moment in Jewish American theatre history, Dinneford's clash with the Providence audience arose from a different understanding of how the trappings of the playhouse should reflect the physical and imagined landscape of the community, or how it should allow spectators to read the "semiotics of the [nineteenth-century] city." Providence audiences had enjoyed almost two decades of seeing their homes, civic buildings, and businesses presented to them every time they visited the theatre. Their drop curtain also showed off a view of the city to visitors and outsiders. As Heather Roberts notes, "the elevated vantage-point of . . . bird's eye panoramas enabled [nineteenth-century artists] to present viewers with an illusion of all-encompassing visual and epistemological control over the city's expanse."<sup>30</sup> Dinneford's plan to remove that image—and perhaps that sense of control—underscored his outsider status and suggested a lack of respect for the community's history.

As I noted in the case of the failed venture with Boston's Federal Street Theatre, it is virtually impossible to determine whether part of the backlash against Dinneford was due to his Jewish heritage. In expressing their disapproval of Dinneford's choice to replace their familiar drop curtain, was the Providence audience also expressing their resistance to this "adventurer's" outsider status? Did they read his wish to bring the cosmopolitan advantages of the London, Philadelphia, and New York theatres to Providence as evidence of his inescapable Jewish "otherness"?

The Boston and Providence incidents might well have happened to any new manager who came in from the "outside," and, as I have noted, aside from the fact that Dinneford's contemporaries apparently knew he was Jewish, no explicit anti-Semitism marks his interactions in these two cities. In considering how (or whether) Dinneford's Jewish heritage "ghosted" his professional career, though, I cite one more incident from 1845 that hints that Dinneford's Jewish identity may have shaped others' responses to him more than it first appears. By the spring of 1845 Dinneford had become the manager of Palmo's Opera House in New York City, where he staged a production of *Antigone*. Edgar Allan Poe, in his role of theatre critic, contacted Dinneford requesting a free ticket. Poe then wrote an absolutely scathing review of the piece, deriding it as a pedantic folly. On April 15, Dinneford responded angrily that in gratitude for the free ticket, he had expected that Poe would do the production justice (as Poe himself had offered in his initial letter requesting the ticket). Poe printed Dinneford's letter in the *Broadway Journal* a few days later, along with his own mocking reply to the outraged manager. Throughout Poe's response, he invokes the term "justice," reminding Dinneford that doing justice does not necessarily entail a favorable outcome for all involved.<sup>31</sup> Whether or not it was intentional, the repeated use of the word "justice" by both men recalls *The Merchant of Venice* and Portia's admonition to Shylock that "For, as thou urgest justice, be assured / Thou shalt have justice, more than thou desirest."<sup>32</sup>

Durang's off-the-cuff description of Dinneford as a "dashing Israelite" has prompted my strain of speculation about the events of his career that another, "unmarked" actor-manager might not have inspired. Perhaps the lesson Dinneford's career teaches historians most clearly is that once the *suspicion* of anti-Semitism enters the equation, it ghosts every encounter, no matter how seemingly innocent.

## "AN ADVENTUROUS BOY"

As theatrical ventures expanded westward, so did traveling circuits for Jewish actors.<sup>33</sup> Among the most successful of these was the Nathans circus family, in particular John Jay Nathans, a figure well-known to scholars of both circus and equestrian entertainments.<sup>34</sup> Described as "an adventurous boy," Nathans debuted in Columbia, South Carolina, on December 4, 1829. For the next half-century, he traveled as both a performer and circus manager, becoming not only immensely wealthy in the process (upon his death he left a fortune of roughly half a million dollars), but also nurturing rising generations of circus performers including the Pastors and the Kincaids, among others. Nathans and his family stand alongside the Phillippes as among the country's first Jewish American theatre dynasties. A cursory review of the hundreds of surviving playbills and records of Nathans' performances documents both the astonishing feats he performed (such as standing on a galloping horse with a standing child balanced on his shoulders) and the patriotic themes frequently incorporated into the productions in which he appeared, including celebrations of George Washington or American independence. One set of playbills from 1844–1845 is particularly arresting for the spectacle it promised a cosmopolitan audience of experienced theatregoers: "The Grand Comic Pantomime of the Wandering Jew."<sup>35</sup>

The advertisement for this harlequinade described "A Silver Cavern at the center of the Earth, where the last incantations of the Wandering Jew Zamuel will compel the descent of the Gnome Field through the contending elements." The evening's entertainment would also feature "an ariel abode of Funny Fairies" and a "Crystal Tableau."<sup>36</sup> While the fanciful elements of the program may seem familiar and the Wandering Jew a convenient comical villain for this kind of extravaganza, the playbill also contains an ambiguous notation describing Zamuel as "a wanderer by profession and a Jew resting in Philadelphia." The line suggests that Zamuel the "professional wanderer" has taken temporary refuge among the Jews of Philadelphia, thus making an explicit connection between the stock character of the Wandering Jew and the local Philadelphia Jewish audience that might have witnessed the performance.

The figure of the Wandering Jew continued to make sporadic appearances on the national stage in the first decades of the early republic, but it appeared primarily in comic afterpieces such as late eighteenth-century

comedy of *The Wandering Jew* (discussed in chapter 3) or the 1843 spectacle *Ahasuerus, or the Wandering Jew*, which followed the Jewish character in his various wanderings from Jerusalem to Versailles to the afterlife.<sup>37</sup> But aside from these intermittent appearances and sporadic epithets scattered among various early national plays, the visibility of the character and his comic usefulness waned during those decades. With the 1844 serialized publication of French author's Eugène Sue's *Le Juif Errant* (translated as *The Wandering Jew*), interest in the character revived and the American stage witnessed a new influx of "Wandering Jew" plays based on Sue's story. Newspapers throughout the United States advertised installments of the story for sale as soon as they appeared, and theatre companies hastened to capitalize on the public's renewed interest.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, by 1847 Sue's story had become so popular that playwright James Kirke Paulding referred to it jokingly in his play *Madmen All, or the Cure of Love*, a comedy set in Philadelphia. Garafelia Fizgig, a young lady much enamored of "the new school of Romance," declares herself scandalized that her more provincial neighbor, Mrs. Prosy, "would rather read a cookery book than *The Wandering Jew*!"<sup>39</sup> Garafelia's mother reassures her that the Prosy family members are not the bumpkins she imagines, since their son "has just returned from abroad. . . . He has been to Rome, and Vienna, and Paris, and London, and Grand Cairo, to inform his mind, and improve his manners, and has just got home."<sup>40</sup> This evidence of cosmopolitan sophistication reassures Garafelia that there is at least one person in the Prosy family who will appreciate her more sophisticated tastes. It also presents an ironic commentary on the difference between the traveler and the wanderer: the gentleman who travels "to inform his mind and improve his manners" and has a "home" to return to versus the perpetual wanderer who sojourns among "Vienna, and Paris, and London, and Grand Cairo" because he is never allowed to settle permanently in any one place.

While Paulding's allusion to *The Wandering Jew* is only a passing one, its association with Philadelphia's fashionable culture becomes more meaningful when paired with the Nathans' "Grand Comic Pantomime of the Wandering Jew," which specifically sets Zamuel the wanderer among the Jews of Philadelphia. The city's Jewish community had continued to thrive throughout the mid-nineteenth century, launching numerous charitable organizations and boasting one of the country's most successful Jewish newspapers (Leeser's *The Occident*, launched in 1843). As Nathans, Leeser, and others demonstrated, the city continued to absorb new Jewish immigrants at the same time it offered one of the most settled Jewish communities in America.

"THE LIST SEEMS NEVER-ENDING"

The incidents I have investigated in the previous sections of this chapter suggest some of the ways in which Jewish American artists engaged with specific local audiences. In the section below I explore more fragmented episodes in the history of Jewish performers, managers, and theatre patrons across the nation from the 1830s to the 1860s. Networks that had been localized and scattered, expanded until they created a thickly clustered maze of interconnections. Knots of dramatic encounter once linked by the most fragile of threads grew more and more substantial and intricate over the passage of time. Yet as the knots became increasingly complex, new strands became entangled in the process. Casual biases sharpened into active animosity as the increased conspicuousness and perceived power of Jewish artists drew fresh attacks. Shifting political and economic sands—whether it was the rise of nativist politics or urban expansion that prompted fears about the confidence man—all contributed to the ways in which diverse audiences (Jews and non-Jews) responded to encounters with itinerant Jewish performers or established managers, no matter how obscure or how famous.

The kinds of anecdotes I examine below proliferated as Jewish visibility increased in the American theatre. Indeed, by 1879 journalist Henry H. Marks would pen a satirical pamphlet titled "Down with the Jews," in which he imagined a meeting of a cabal he dubbed the "American Society for the Suppression of the Jews" (an eerie echo of the 1820s Society for Ameliorating the Condition of the Jews). Among the society's complaints, he speculated, was the anxiety that "We find our clubs and hotels invaded by Jews, who also fill our theatres, managed by Jewish managers who hire Jewish artists to perform the works of Jewish authors."<sup>41</sup> Marks's claim raises the question: How had Jews created the perception that they *dominated* the theatrical landscape within a forty-year span of time?

The 1830s and 1840s brought more transatlantic performers of Jewish descent into the American circuit, including Mr. and Mrs. Robert Keeley, described by M. J. Landa as "Jewish artists of distinction."<sup>42</sup> An 1836 essay in *The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine* hailed Mrs. Keeley as "an actress unlike any we remember to have seen on the Park [Theatre] boards," and while Mr. Keeley was described as having a manner "altogether peculiar to himself," he too was acclaimed as a "sterling acquisition" for the American stage.<sup>43</sup>

Mrs. Keeley (born Mary Ann Goward) was known to be of Jewish ances-



try. In her memoirs, she recalled an interview given to an American reporter about her encounter with a Jewish family in Mobile, Alabama, in 1837:

My life was saved in Mobile by a Jewish family, named Jones or Wolffe, if I am not mistaken. I had a bad attack of fever and ague, caused, I think, by rats. It was supposed that the vermin had got into my room and on to my bed, where they bit me severely. This led to blood poisoning, and I was sick onto death in lodgings among people I did not know. But those good souls took me to their home and waited upon me like slaves. They were not wealthy, but they did what they could for me, and I recovered under their constant care.

The interviewer then asked her “whether it was true, as reported, that Mrs. Keeley had Jewish blood in her veins?” According to her memoirs, she responded with alacrity: “Quite true . . . my great-great-grandparents were of the Jewish persuasion, and I am proud of that fact. The Jews are a noble race, God’s chosen ones, perhaps the beloved of the Father. The Hebrew people have given some brilliant names to music and the drama, right royal names, I think. And the list seems never-ending.”<sup>44</sup>

Nothing in Keeley’s description of the dramatic encounter in Mobile hints that *she* imputed the family’s kindness to their recognition of a fellow Jew. But the reporter’s question about her Jewish ancestry that followed upon the heels of her story suggests that for those operating outside Jewish networks, “Jewishness” appeared a common denominator that united Jews around the world, no matter their social status, profession, or national origin; the reporter’s question implies an almost instinctive association.

I have noted that historians are generally eager to claim “firsts” in Jewish contributions to the theatre, since among a history of constant displacements, a “first” offers a specific point at which to begin a story. Many seem equally anxious to claim *numbers*, as Keeley did when she stated that the list of Jewish contributors to Western culture “seems never-ending.” And indeed, there comes a tipping point in the history of the mid-nineteenth-century American theatre where observers such as Marks perceived that the number of Jewish or Jewish-descended performers had reached a sufficient mass in the culture that their numbers might actually overtake those of non-Jewish performers. While “wandering” figures remained among the pantheon of Jewish artists on the national stage, critics also marked the rise of a growing



series of networks with strong connections across the landscape. In addition to the successful Nathans family,<sup>45</sup> the Lipman family (Moses, Samuel, and Lewis) were also all well-known and well-traveled Philadelphia-born circus performers. But perhaps the best-known Jewish-descended acting family in the United States was the Wallacks.<sup>46</sup>

No discussion of cosmopolitan theatrical family networks would be complete without the Wallack family. An immensely talented group of performers (both male and female), the Wallacks contributed more than a century's worth of entertainment to the British and American stage. Descended from British actors who had performed with Garrick, they gained renown on both sides of the Atlantic. Lester Wallack's final tribute performance—a production of *Hamlet* in May of 1888 featuring a host of stars, from Edwin Booth as Hamlet to Joseph Jefferson III as the gravedigger—netted more than \$20,000.<sup>47</sup> Clippings about the event from newspapers across the United States fill multiple scrapbooks at the Harvard Theatre Collection.<sup>48</sup> Those clippings—perhaps more than any other source—testify to the Wallacks' networks and the ways they parlayed their travels and their investments in American playhouses into a cosmopolitan identity that audiences could share.<sup>49</sup> Yet despite his general popularity, Lester Wallack's ventures also drew negative attention from those who perceived his business successes as a threat (though a threat to *what* is not clear) and who linked his theatrical work with his Jewish heritage. For example, in Marks's comic pamphlet "Down with the Jews" cited above, the members of the American Society for the Suppression of the Jews supposedly resolve that: "We will not attend Wallack's Theatre because [Lester] Wallack is of Jewish descent and his treasurer, Theodore Moss, is a Jew."<sup>50</sup>

Although Marks's pamphlet appeared some twenty years after Lester Wallack had launched his first major ventures as a manager, and although Jews remained a minority population in the United States in the 1850s and 1860s, they were still generating sufficient economic visibility to draw attention to their participation in American culture. For example, an 1856 *New York Picayune* cartoon about the opening of an Italian opera "showed Jews in attendance as a row of noses."<sup>51</sup> Just a year before, in 1855, Isaac Leeser, editor of *The Occident*, had warned his coreligionists that the perception of Jews as a network of brokers and businessmen was perhaps equally as dangerous as the image of Jews as peddlers or wanderers: "It is not wise to let the distinctive character of Israelites remain that of a commercial people."<sup>52</sup>

## PRIVATE VENTURES AND AMATEUR ASSOCIATIONS

If Jewish-born artists like Dinneford, Mrs. Keeley, or the Wallacks tried to bring a sophisticated sensibility to the theatres they worked with, what did Jewish audience members bring? Urban theatregoers such as New York's Mordecai Noah or Richmond's Samuel Mordecai might be expected to demonstrate the refined tastes of a city palate, or what Jonathan Sarna has described as a "cosmopolitan outlook."<sup>53</sup> But as theatrical ventures and the nation's Jewish immigrant population expanded westward, as theatres and communities grew together, how would Jewish audience members interpret the entertainments available to them? Could Jewish audience members shed the image of "a commercial people" and demonstrate a more critical aesthetic engagement with the theatre? Below I explore some of the histories of a rising generation of Jewish audience members. Some kept diaries that recorded their impressions of frontier entertainments, while others created new settings for theatrical performances, ranging from amateur associations to privately funded playhouses, giving them a greater measure of control over what was performed.

The diary of sometime-peddler, businessman, and telegraph operator Edward Rosewater offers a glimpse into the kinds of entertainments that a Jewish audience member traveling through the midwest and southern parts of the United States enjoyed shortly before the Civil War; it also suggests that even comparatively recent immigrants envisioned themselves as competent cultural critics in their new country. Rosewater's family had emigrated to America from Bohemia in 1854, and his diary begins recording his attendance at theatrical performances only four years later, when he was seventeen.<sup>54</sup>

Rosewater saw performances in venues as far flung as Murfreesboro, Nashville, and Chattanooga in Tennessee, and in Cincinnati and St. Louis. Some of his entries reveal a cosmopolitan sensibility, as in his description of a performance on September 19, 1859, when he attended an evening's entertainment that featured *The Child of the Regiment* and "Mummy & Dance & Songs." His only comment about the production was that it was "Good enough for Murfreesboro & the Place & Stage."<sup>55</sup> Other diary entries record his attendance at everything from circus performances in Nashville to the German theatre in St. Louis (for a production of *Lumpaci Vagabundus*) to the National Theatre in Cincinnati (where he saw Edwin Booth play King Lear).<sup>56</sup>

Rosewater's diaries show him seeking the community of an audience wherever he traveled (a kind of community perhaps not accessible to him elsewhere). His diaries also chronicle his attendance at various synagogues throughout his travels, and even his occasional ventures to hear sermons at local churches.<sup>57</sup> These entries document his efforts to adhere to his family's spiritual traditions by connecting with Jewish communities among the various cities he visited, as well as his intellectual curiosity about the Gentile communities in which he circulated.

If Rosewater's diaries project a hunger for cosmopolitan entertainments and a sense of community, the associations and amateur performance clubs springing up among various groups of Jewish young people from New York City across the frontier point to a similar desire to cultivate more sophisticated tastes, while at the same time celebrating a sense of shared history that was both Jewish *and* American.<sup>58</sup> Cincinnati offers a strong example of this dynamic. It had a thriving Jewish community by the mid-nineteenth century, and it also boasted a substantial number of both amateur and professional theatre ventures supported by Jewish citizens.

On December 22, 1854, the Cincinnati paper *The Israelite* described a celebration that had taken place at the Allemania Club on the evening of its fourth anniversary:

Speeches, music, both vocal and instrumental, and theatrical performance graced the festivity, at which a sumptuous supper was partaken of by about one hundred and fifty persons of both sexes. All that we have seen and heard on the occasion confirmed the good opinion we hold of the society. There is talent, intelligence, taste, and good will among our young men, scarcely surpassed by any other association.<sup>59</sup>

*The Israelite's* description of the talent, intelligence, and taste displayed by the association's members spotlights both a sense of pride in the group itself, and in the impressive number of community members, 150, who gathered to witness the event. One week later, *The Israelite* published another telling account of an event at the Allemania, describing the club as "filled to its capacity by a highly respectable audience to listen to the youthful artists of our people." The phrase "the youthful artists of *our people* [emphasis mine]" stakes a cultural claim for the city's Jewish citizens that echoes Mrs. Keeley's observation (cited above) that "the Hebrew people have given some brilliant names to music and the drama."<sup>60</sup>

By 1855, amateur clubs for Cincinnati's Jewish residents were proliferating at an exciting rate.<sup>61</sup> The groups included the Young Men's Literary Club, the Harmonie Society, and the Young Men's Union Dramatic Association, the latter of which was described as having been "formed for the purpose of giving Dramatic performances and for instructing the members (Jewish youths) in the various branches of elocution."<sup>62</sup> The Harmonie Society assured its members that it was "Open every evening and *all day on Sundays* [emphasis mine] for the promotion of social and intellectual intercourse."<sup>63</sup> The reminder that the Harmonie Society was open on Sundays was important for Jewish citizens living in what were still predominantly Gentile communities that prohibited entertainments on the Christian Sabbath.

Club performances often included pieces from various operas, as well as Shakespeare's works and familiar plays from the repertoires in professional playhouses. Both the Dramatic Association and the Harmonie Society frequently gave concerts for the benefit of the city's poor. As *The Israelite* reported on March 6, 1857, "Our youth of this city are very charitably inclined, and revere the dramatic art. They united into a dramatic club, and played in the Hall of the Allemania. . . . The net proceeds are given to the Hebrew Relief Society. . . . There is much taste and talent in our youngsters—this is fortunate; but there is charity about them. This is glorious."<sup>64</sup>

Despite their successes in their own amateur ventures and their support of the city's professional theatre companies, however, Cincinnati's Jewish community received occasional reminders that they were still considered outsiders. Describing "The late Amateur Performance at the National Theatre" (presumably by a different group than the amateur Jewish theatre troupe), *The Israelite* proclaimed:

Sorry are we to say it, and painful it is to us, to put on record that this Amateur Performance, gotten up specially for the poor, has offered us another opportunity of seeing how much intolerance still remains in this land. . . . If their idea was originally to exclude the Jews from any share in the proceeds of this benefit, why did they not announce it as a performance for the benefit of all the poor *excepting* the Jewish poor, and then the many Hebrews who paid for their admission on the night of the performance might have saved their money and donated it themselves to a better purpose?<sup>65</sup>

The complaint is telling on many levels. The author notes that there were "many Hebrews" in the audience, all of whom had come to support a cause

that would extend charity across the city's diverse communities. The author mourns that what should have been an opportunity for the audience to unite instead showcased the fissures among Jewish and non-Jewish spectators. The author rebuked the event's patrons for their "disregard for the feelings of so large a class of men as are the Jews of Cincinnati." Moreover, the writer hinted that the performance had been a pretext to buy votes among the poor and that the proceeds were being given to Catholics and other religious groups instead of the Jews because the Jews' votes could not be bought.<sup>66</sup> While it may have been a pyrrhic victory to attribute their exclusion to an excess of integrity, the article underscores the author's sense that "so large" a portion of the population could no longer be ignored. Rather than passing quietly like the Jewish wanderer of ancient lore, this portion of the people wanted to claim their place in the landscape.

In contrast to the collaborative endeavors launched by the amateur groups described above, Jewish businessman and Cincinnati resident Samuel N. Pike preferred to undertake his theatrical experiments without a network of associates from his community. Pike had been born in New York City and before moving to Cincinnati had lived in Connecticut, Florida, Virginia, Maryland, and Missouri. He had worked as a grocer, a dry goods merchant, a speculator in cotton, and a crockery seller before setting up a business in Cincinnati rectifying whisky.<sup>67</sup> One newspaper described him as "a delicately-built man. . . . His demeanor is always of the quietest character, strictly unostentatious, and apparently self-reliant to a degree seldom found among men. In dress, always neat, but without display. He would scarcely be recognized, so young and unassuming, as being possessed of those characteristics which fully distinguished him since he came into our midst."<sup>68</sup>

In 1857, Pike decided to build an opera house to showcase international singing star Jenny Lind. Lack of funds during the financial slump of 1857–1858 slowed the project, but the theatre finally opened on February 22, 1859. The Samuel Pike whose self-reliance was praised by the newspapers had apparently undertaken the project without any significant support from additional backers. Indeed, this same self-reliance made him a multimillionaire by age forty.

*The Israelite* praised Pike's generosity and vision in bringing such a cosmopolitan and elegant venue to Cincinnati: "The thanks of the community are due to Mr. Pike for having given us the first opera in this city. The house is splendid. The interior splendor in every respect surpasses every thing in the West, and vies with all similar buildings in the East and in Europe. . . . The audience was very large and distinguished."<sup>69</sup> A few days later, *The Is-*

*raelite* praised the playhouse as “an ornament to Cincinnati” and observed that it needed the support of its “European-bred” patrons (perhaps a not-too-subtle code for Jewish?) to succeed. The author observed that some American-born audiences still harbored “religious prejudices, of which Europeans have not the remotest idea,” about the theatre, a statement that implies a distinction between Pike’s Jewish and non-Jewish audiences. *The Israelite* also pointed to the lack of sophistication of the Ohio-bred audiences, compared with the European-born settlers in the playhouse: “Some having spent a lifetime in the backwoods, and having thus become wealthy, cannot fully appreciate the pleasures and enjoyments of refined society.”<sup>70</sup> Even when competition and economic challenges forced the playhouse to add traditional theatrical productions to its opera season, citizens reported that “there is about the place an atmosphere of the opera—an atmosphere of elegance, propriety, refinement.”<sup>71</sup> It also became a popular venue for balls and meetings of the city’s various youth associations.

On March 22, 1866, Pike’s Opera House in Cincinnati burned to the ground. Local newspapers clamored immediately for Pike to rebuild the playhouse, claiming that Cincinnati needed “a large and commodious theatre.”<sup>72</sup> Pike declined. Despite his refusals, his fellow Cincinnatians persisted, and the local papers buzzed with rumors of funds raised in Pike’s name to support another playhouse. Supporters also lobbied him to run for mayor as an enticement to keep him tied to the community. Yet he continued to hold himself aloof. A minor scandal arose when a group of men claimed to be selling shares for a new playhouse with Pike’s consent, something he adamantly denied.<sup>73</sup> Pike, one of the richest men in America, wanted neither partners nor admirers among a community that he had concluded was too provincial in its tastes to support the kind of theatre he hoped to foster. He turned his attention instead to building a lavish playhouse in New York, where he felt sure of a more appreciative audience.

### “FOR THEY ABIDE WITH US”

While Pike turned his steps back toward the East, other Jewish Americans set their faces westward, following the expanding frontier. The Gold Rush of 1848 sent tens of thousands of immigrants—Jews and Gentiles, Americans, Europeans, Asians, and others—streaking for the California territory to make their fortune. Many Jewish settlers trekked to the gold fields where

they enjoyed varying degrees of success, just like their non-Jewish counterparts.<sup>74</sup> Others went to the gold fields as peddlers, rather than miners, or set themselves up as brokers and shopkeepers in the cities that had blossomed so rapidly to accommodate the ever-expanding stream of new hopefuls.<sup>75</sup> For some this influx of outsiders proved upsetting, and those xenophobes ridiculed *all* new settlers, including the Japanese, the New Zealanders, the Italians, the French, and the "thick-lipped, hook-nosed, ox-eyed, cunning, oily Jews."<sup>76</sup> As scholars of California history have commented, the rapid expansion of the territory produced a kind of leveling effect among the first generations of settlers, particularly in the western hubs of Sacramento and San Francisco. Social and religious differences were—if not entirely forgotten—at least relegated to a less critical space in the imagination of a community united by a common drive to expand and thrive. By the late 1850s, only a decade years after the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill, Jewish immigrants had become a significant portion of the population in San Francisco.<sup>77</sup>

A clear testimonial to Jews' successful settlement in San Francisco appeared in the *Daily Alta California* on September 18, 1858. The swelling populations of the West Coast produced an insatiable demand for imported goods. These goods generally came by steamer, and the ships' arrivals with necessities, luxuries, and news from the East were so highly anticipated that residents of San Francisco routinely looked forward to "steamer day." On September 18, 1858, "steamer day" coincided with Yom Kippur. As noted above, Jews and Gentiles often clashed about laws prohibiting work on the Christian Sabbath, while Jewish holidays received scant, if any, official public recognition. San Franciscans of 1858 proved the exception to this practice. On that date, the *Alta California* ran a lengthy article explaining the history of Yom Kippur, noting that "in consequence of those in the mercantile world not being able to transact business today, which in the usual course of affairs would have been steamer-day, the Postmaster and the agents of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, with that courtesy and deference they have always paid, have postponed the sailing of the steamer until the 21<sup>st</sup>."<sup>78</sup> The paper boasted proudly that "No other part of the world can instance a similar act of liberality."<sup>79</sup>

Yet, as the paper observed, the Gentile community's recognition of Jews' rights to their religious observance was not predicated on mere "liberality" but on Gentiles' awareness of the substantial contributions that Jewish citizens had made to the city:



The Jewish portion of the citizens of California constitute a very important element of our inhabitants, more numerous than would be generally believed. They exercise considerable influence and never has that influence been perverted [*sic*]. As a class, they have built up for themselves a name they can justly pride themselves on. They have adopted California as their home; their families cluster around their 'own vine and fig tree,' and a future generation is growing up in our midst. They are Californians, for they abide with us. At the bar, in the forum, on the commercial mart, the press, medicine, agriculture, mechanics, and the *fine arts* [emphasis mine], they occupy prominent positions and have won the respect and esteem of all.<sup>80</sup>

The grateful recognition that California's Jews had made significant contributions to the fine arts in the young city of San Francisco stands in sharp contrast to the comical epithets or bitter jibes flung at some East Coast Jewish actors and managers (from Moses "Nosey" Phillips to the Wallacks and their manager, Theodore Moss). Over the next decades Jewish artists and Jewish citizens would assume an increasingly prominent place in the San Francisco landscape.

Theatrical entertainments began to emerge in San Francisco and nearby communities in the late 1840s. Those areas that could not attract professional troupes contented themselves with creating amateur companies, as was the case with the Amateur Thespian Society created in Young's Hill (near present-day Sacramento). The company's stage manager, Charles De Long, kept a voluminous diary in which he recorded the doings of the thirteen-person troupe. Interestingly, De Long also recorded the other entertainments in which he participated, including a "Jew Dance" he attended on May 28, 1859, and a "Jewish Party" he attended on March 26, 1862, at Henry Labatt's (secretary of San Francisco's First Hebrew Benevolent Society).<sup>81</sup> De Long's observations document the extent to which social circles among Jews and Gentiles overlapped in midcentury California. De Long's Jewish party companions may have been among the audiences for his amateur theatrical company, just as De Long attended dances and parties with the Jewish citizens of the community.

Jews and Gentiles of San Francisco would soon have even more opportunities for social interaction. As the *Annals of the San Francisco Stage* and its companion volume, *The San Francisco Stage*, record, playhouse after playhouse emerged in rapid succession throughout the 1850s. Some

succumbed to fire and others to financial failure, but all offered venues for the city's diverse populations to seek entertainment. The promise of a lucrative new market drew celebrities from the eastern United States and England, including Jewish performers such as Frank Chanfrau (who resurrected his ever-popular character of Mose in *Mose in California*) and the dashing Gougenheim sisters, Adelaide and Joey, who rose as stars in San Francisco before continuing their trek around the globe to Australia. The Gougenheim sisters in particular captured the attention of the city. One local newspaper offered a poem to Joey, reputed the livelier of the two, while Adelaide appeared stately and reserved. In the poem, the author hailed Joey as "a laughing sprite," and others described her as "arch, coquettish, merry-hearted, and joyous."<sup>82</sup>

San Francisco also showcased the dramatic work of Manuel Mordecai Noah, son of Mordecai Noah. Manuel M. Noah was also a dedicated journalist like his father and spent many years of his career writing for various California newspapers before his early death in 1873.<sup>83</sup> And, like his father, Noah believed in preserving Jewish history. In 1852 he published an essay titled "The Day of Vengeance."<sup>84</sup> He explained:

The Day of Vengeance is solemnized alike in this country, as it is wherever the remnant of Israel abide; and in what country are they not found? But a day of happiness is to be seen in the vista of years, and Israel may once more rejoice. The example set the world by the United States has shown that toleration can stimulate to good deeds—that the Israelite can, and has received the entire confidence of his Christian brethren—that to an Israelite is to be ascribed greater meekness, and more virtues than the generality of his fellow-citizens.<sup>85</sup>

Noah's text reveals his appreciation for the tolerance he sensed for Jewish settlers among Gentile Americans and his acknowledgment that the "day of happiness" for the nation's Jews still hovered on the horizon, since much remained to be done to eradicate anti-Jewish prejudice from the landscape.

Noah shared his father's appreciation for theatre. He was a familiar figure among his fellow audience members, just as his voice was a popular one within the San Francisco community. He penned at least one play—*Love's Disguises; or The Daughter's Vow*—which, according to the *Daily Alta*, enjoyed a "tremendous run" at Maguire's Opera House in September of 1858.<sup>86</sup> The play offered a breeches role for popular actress Mrs. John Wood, which

may have boosted its reception.<sup>87</sup> *The Daily Alta* described the piece as “an extremely creditable production.”<sup>88</sup> Although Noah never achieved his father’s level of success as a dramatist, he escaped some of the controversy and bias that had surrounded Mordecai Noah. Indeed, the Noah name seems to have lent him some cachet among San Francisco audiences, and I draw a sharp contrast between the 1828 cartoon image of Mordecai Noah being whipped in front of the theatre with signs for *The Jew* and *The Hypocrite* on display, and the general approbation that Manuel Noah enjoyed (at least among the city’s theatre-going population). Manuel Noah along with other Jewish entertainers and Jewish San Franciscans demonstrated an ability to integrate themselves into the larger communities in which they circulated. While they remained visible as Jews (as the 1858 Yom Kippur article in the *Daily Alta* attests), some of the negative associations with Jewish “conspicuousness” had evidently diminished.

There was however one Jewish San Franciscan whose conspicuousness on the streets and in the playhouse would become legendary, and his strange story concludes this chapter. “Emperor” Joshua Norton had been born in London, raised in Cape Town, South Africa, and moved to San Francisco in 1849, following the reports of the Gold Rush. Norton became a successful businessman, but his ventures crashed in the mid-1850s. He resurfaced in 1859 with a published declaration in the *San Francisco Bulletin* naming himself Emperor of the United States (to which he later added the title Protector of Mexico).

Norton quickly developed into one of the city’s most beloved eccentrics. He assembled a uniform of his own design, apparently made up of various castoff military coats (including a blue coat with gold epaulets that would become his signature), a tall beaver hat with feathers, and a walking stick. This odd, rag-tag collection of garments made him instantly recognizable on the city’s streets.<sup>89</sup> He was photographed and sketched countless times, and those signature costume pieces quickly became familiar to both local and national audiences who read about him or saw his image reproduced. While for many spectators Norton’s self-made uniform might have conveyed nothing more than his eccentricities, it is tempting with the advantage of historical hindsight to compare Norton’s costume to that of Shylock, the Wandering Jew, or even the “Beau” Mordecai from *Love à la Mode*. Each of those characters wore signature pieces that made them identifiable to audiences, marking them as Jews and perennial outsiders. By contrast, Norton’s

well-worn blue coat and extravagant hat were accepted and even anticipated sights as he was given the freedom of the city.

Norton issued his own currency, lived in local hotels and boarding houses (apparently largely on the beneficence of the managers), strolled the streets of "his" city, graciously acknowledged his "subjects," and periodically issued political proclamations, such as firing the governor who had hanged John Brown and even dissolving the United States of America. Not wishing to offend any of his subjects, Norton attended services at synagogues and churches alike.<sup>90</sup> When an "overzealous Special Patrol Officer" arrested Norton for a mental disorder in 1867, clamorous protests filled the city's papers. Norton was released with an apology, and apparently "All police officers began to salute His Majesty when he passed them on the street."<sup>91</sup>

Theatre managers generally offered Norton free tickets, and he became a fixture in the city's burgeoning theatrical culture. Thus he would certainly have had the opportunity to see performances by the talented Jewish artists described above, though he would also have been witness to an even more notable spectacle in the playhouse as well: a collection of comical pieces that focused on his own career as the city's "Emperor." On September 17, 1861, Tucker's Academy of Music presented *Norton the First, or An Emperor for a Day*. One newspaper commented, "The new melodeon at Tucker's Hall is among the most popular places of resort in the city. An original burlesque entitled 'Norton the First' or 'An Emperor for a Day' is now being played nightly, creating roars of irrepressible laughter. Walter Bray enacts Norton I, making up his part very effectively and clothing the character with his inexhaustible fund of comicalities. The whole dramatic company is enlisted in this musical extravaganza."<sup>92</sup> In 1864, Maguire's produced another Norton play, and in 1867 the Olympia produced *The Naked Truth, or The Emperor's Dream*, which supposedly provoked Norton to issue a new proclamation: "Norton I, gratia Deo, Emperor of United States and Protector of Mexico—Prohibits the Performance of any play termed Norton I, or any burlesque, travesty, etc., in which the Emperor shall be introduced, unless under authority of the Supreme Court, or unless our own personal signature and seal shall first have been obtained thereto."<sup>93</sup>

Unfortunately for him, theatre managers, finding Norton a popular subject, failed to heed the Emperor's proclamation. New managers coming into the business may also have been less inclined to admit Norton to their theatres for free, prompting him to issue a second proclamation: "WHEREAS

The want of proper courtesy and attention shown to our Imperial Person upon our late visits to the theatres is likely to lose prestige and do much injury to the national cause with foreigners visiting San Francisco, Therefore I, Norton I, Emperor of the United States' and Protector of Mexico and Cuba, do hereby decree that any neglect or refusal to admit us, on any occasion, shall make the offending traitor liable to five years' imprisonment upon Alcatraz Island."<sup>94</sup>

Though it issued from the pen of a noted eccentric, the statement that "any neglect of refusal to admit" a Jewish audience member was an act of treason marks a notable shift from Jewish audience members' efforts to secure their place in the playhouse only half a century before. What does the tale of Emperor Norton reveal about the status of Jewish American citizens on the eve of the Civil War? While the plays depicting him suggest he was, for many Californians, a comical figure, he was also a familiar and, perhaps most importantly, an *accepted* part of the landscape. Mordecai Noah's declaration a few decades before that "It is time there should be a Jew President" had met with only ridicule. Joshua Norton's "reign" as Emperor from 1859 to his death in 1880 suggested that some Gentile Americans at least had become reconciled to the notion that "they abide with us."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Beautiful Pagans*

#### Dramatic and Domestic Encounters

September 15, 1752, marked fifteen-year-old Helen Hallam's debut as Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice* in Williamsburg, Virginia's small wooden playhouse.<sup>1</sup> It also marked the first performance of a stage Jewess in the professional American theatre. Over the next century, Jessica's character would remain a favorite with audiences and actors alike, and she would be joined by a host of other stage Jewesses who would help American theatregoers interrogate and interpret roles of Jewish women in American culture. Some of these figures hewed to familiar orientalized stereotypes, while others broke new ground, anticipating a broader cultural shift toward representations of republican motherhood. Many were imported from British theatrical repertoires but found American audiences ready to recognize and claim them as their own. As with the history of so many of the stage types I have discussed thus far, characters may have been "vernacularized" by American performers and American audiences, but there was no linear progression from negative to positive. The *overall* trajectory of women's representation on the nineteenth-century stage may have been toward more independent characters (as the work of theatre scholars Amy Hughes, Kim Marra, Lisa Merrill, Elizabeth Reitz Mullenix, Amelia Howe Kritzer, and others attest), but in this chapter I examine ongoing tensions between the "domestic feminism" and "crisis of visibility" that stage Jewesses depicted.

I have returned to the theme of "conspicuousness" throughout this study, and I invoke it again here in the context of Kimberly Snyder Manganelli's discussion of Jewish women and the public sphere. As Manganelli contends, assuming roles beyond the domestic realm could result in a dangerous visibility for Jewish women already rendered vulnerable by the circulation of popular stereotypes that presented them as "public women on display." As the "Tragic Muse"—embodied by flamboyant performers such as the nineteenth-century French star Rachel Félix and American star Adah Isa-

cs Menken—the Jewess “incarnated forces seemingly inimical to domestic womanhood.” These women’s apparent willingness to participate in a process of “self-commodification” fed pernicious stereotypes of Jewish women as hyper-eroticized figures while simultaneously reminding observers that the women themselves were consciously manipulating these images.<sup>2</sup>

The visibility of exotic stage Jewesses, or of Jewish actresses such as Félix or Menken, has often overshadowed their humbler counterparts: characters or actresses who eschewed the fate of the Tragic Muse to pursue quieter domestic roles. Sometimes those choices involved conversion to Christianity and a safe marriage to a Gentile suitor. Other times they entailed a renunciation of that same exotic visibility that Manganelli describes in favor of a more traditional role within the Jewish community.

In her rich study *Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America*, Dianne Ashton describes Jewish women’s roles in the “‘domestication’ of American Judaism,” suggesting that this domestication manifested itself in three ways: appropriation and adaptation of successful Gentile institutional forms to “strengthen American Jewish life”; a conscious emphasis on family life *within* the private sphere; and development of a “domestic feminism,” which allowed women to link their social activism to family-focused causes, thus ultimately legitimizing their circulation *beyond* the private sphere.<sup>3</sup>

Novelists, playwrights, and performers puzzled over how to render this kind of domestic feminism dramatically appealing or how to present a character that embodied traditionally feminine qualities with a more public presence. Perhaps not surprisingly, the answer often lay in juxtaposing flamboyant costumes and lavish spectacles against more homespun wifely or maternal virtues. Thus even the most seemingly modest characters might find themselves enshrouded in the trappings of the exotic, thereby accommodating the stereotype of the beautiful Jewess while simultaneously appealing to audiences’ more refined sensibilities. Throughout this chapter, I examine a host of major and minor stage Jewess characters, exploring the ways in which their pursuit of domestic feminism reflected the changing roles of Jewish American women in the years before the Civil War. I also investigate the careers of those female Jewish performers who embodied domestic feminism for their audiences (whether or not they were playing specifically Jewish characters). And I explore the lives and writings of those Jewish and Gentile women whose forays beyond the private sphere of the home shaped changing notions of Jewish American womanhood.



"A CHRISTIAN SOUL LODG'D IN A JEWISH BODY"

As with many of their other theatrical icons, American playgoers inherited their first images of the stage Jewess from a pantheon of English ethnic stereotypes. Michael Ragussis has observed that for mid-eighteenth-century Britons, "Jews were suddenly before everyone's eyes, at the coffeehouses, the Royal Exchange, in the theater pit and boxes—there, in other words to be copied and mimicked."<sup>4</sup> These "copies" made their way rapidly across the Atlantic. Before Sir Walter Scott's fictive Rebecca captured the American imagination in *Ivanhoe*, Shakespeare's Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice* was the best-known and most frequently performed Jewess in American playhouses.<sup>5</sup> Audiences would have been familiar with the "beautiful pagan" who forsakes her father and her faith for a life as a Christian wife.<sup>6</sup>

Jessica also presents a quintessentially feminine and domestic character, much more so than the aggressive Portia. Even Jessica's elopement can be seen as a redemptive rather than transgressive act because it leads to her conversion. Indeed, many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers advocated marriage between Jewish women and Christian men as "a legitimate method for bringing Jews to Christianity."<sup>7</sup> As Ashton observes, characters like Jessica helped to establish traditional Christian representations of Jewish women. Jessica's Jewishness likely posed little threat to Christian audiences in the playhouse since her conversion may have reinforced their own sense of superiority.<sup>8</sup>

Jessica remained a popular role for young actresses from the Restoration and throughout much of the eighteenth century. The part had been substantially rewritten in 1664 and again in 1701. Although Shakespeare's version was largely restored to the London stage in 1741,<sup>9</sup> Jessica's part continued to undergo transformations, including added songs and lines, at least into the 1790s.<sup>10</sup> As the play circulated through British and American repertoires, the character acquired new songs and small scenes along the way. By the late 1760s, advertisements in American newspapers promised audiences that the actresses playing Jessica would sing "songs in character."<sup>11</sup> British lyricist/composer Joseph Baildon created a piece known simply as "Jessica's Song," to be interpolated in act 2, scene 5, just after Jessica observes, "I have a father, you a daughter lost."<sup>12</sup> The simple lyrics suggest that in the Anglo-American imagination of the late 1760s, Jessica represented a pleasure-oriented figure, one that had strayed from her duties to her father and her home. She had

become an awkward hybrid of a character who yearns for domestic simplicity but who uses her sensuality to secure her Christian husband:

Haste Lorenzo, haste away, to my longing arms repair  
 With impatience I shall die. Come and ease thy Jessy's care  
 Let me then in wanton play, sigh and gaze my soul away  
 Sigh and gaze my soul away, sigh and gaze my soul away  
 Let me then in wanton play, sigh and gaze—  
 Sigh and gaze my soul away, sigh and gaze my soul away.<sup>13</sup>

The word “gaze” appears two other times in the play, both times in reference to Jessica. Shylock chastises her not to “thrust your head into the public street / To gaze on Christian fools.”<sup>14</sup> In that instance, Jessica’s “gaze” outward on a Gentile “public” might be imagined as a violation of her proper role as a dutiful Jewish daughter. By contrast, Lorenzo speaks of the “modest gaze” that the power of “sweet music” inspires in wild beasts, an analogy that might apply to the newly married, Christianized, and “domesticated” Jessica.<sup>15</sup>

By the first decades of the nineteenth century, Jessica’s character had not only traversed the Atlantic but had leapt off the stage and into American imaginations. For example, in 1823 an American traveler named Samuel Rogers penned a fanciful poem describing a trip to Venice where he beheld “Now a Jessica / Sung to her lute, her signal as she sate [*sic*] / At her half open window.”<sup>16</sup> For Rogers at least, Jessica seemed a fundamental part of the city’s exotic landscape. Moreover, he envisioned a “Jessica” eagerly awaiting his amorous advances, just as the stage character awaits her lover in the play. *His* Jessica has become a pseudo-Juliet, waiting for her Romeo, but with the added illicit attraction of her forbidden status, perhaps symbolized by the “half-open window.”

Throughout various versions of the play performed on eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century stages, Jessica’s verse shifts back and forth between the rhetoric of sentiment and the language of seduction, a pattern that scholars of early British and American literature—including Elizabeth Barnes, Joseph Fichtelberg, and Julia Stern—have noted recurs throughout the literature of this period.<sup>17</sup> Stern argues that sentimental attachment was generally understood to have an element of reason, and that attachment to ethnic or national identity could be manipulated to promote acculturation or assimilation.<sup>18</sup> With sentimental connection as a strong

qualifying characteristic of sympathetic citizenship, Jessica's ability to shed tears, either for the loss of her friend Launcelot or when parting from her father, suggests her potential fitness to participate in Gentile society, while Shylock's misplaced love of money implicitly disqualifies him from inclusion in a sentimental culture. Yet the same impulse that promotes sentimental identification with family, or a particular nationality or ethnicity, may in some cases produce a kind of emotional or moral amnesia that tips over into dangerous realms of seduction. While sentimental characters preserve an attachment to memory, seduction narratives often accuse subjects of "forgetting" themselves, family, or faith in the act of sensual surrender.

Jessica's fate can represent either sentiment or seduction, depending on the audience member's perspective and the particular production or performance. For Gentile audiences, she might form a sympathetic identification with Christian culture by renouncing her Jewish faith, along with the "hell" of her father's domestic sphere, for the heaven of Portia's estate, Belmont (literally "beautiful mountain"). But the constant, jarring reminders of her heritage throughout the play underscore that she has not forgotten her origins and will have to demonstrate her sentimental attachment to her new Christian community on an ongoing basis. For a Jewish audience, her elopement and theft of her father's ring could be viewed as a repudiation of her past. Her act of forgetting what she is, more than any sexual liaison, becomes her greatest transgression. Jonathan Sarna notes that "from the very beginning of Jewish settlement [in America], Jews and Christians . . . fell in love and got married." He describes this as an "alarming development" to the Jewish American community, "which for religious and social reasons considered intermarriage anathema."<sup>19</sup>

Eighteenth-century discourse on sentiment and seduction has a natural connection to representations of Jewish culture—particularly with regard to Jewish women—on Anglo-American stages. While some scholars have argued that performances of Jewish characters on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century stages simply reified stereotypes, I contend that Jessica's seduction/salvation had no fixed meaning for audiences, whether Gentile or Jewish, British or American. Instead it offered opportunities to renegotiate terms of familial loyalty, religious piety, sexual relationships, and even political allegiances.

Joseph Roach's term "surrogation" offers a useful description of Jessica's function in early American culture. For Roach, surrogation explains "how culture produces or recreates itself," though never by building an exact repli-

ca of the original. Instead, it generates “improvised narratives of authenticity and priority” that “may congeal into full-blown myths of legitimacy and origin.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Jessica crosses a number of boundaries in her journey from Jewish daughter to Christian wife. Each community with which she engages subsequently reconfigures itself around her. As she migrates across cultural, religious, and ethnic lines, she must improvise new myths of her Christian origins. Can she become a surrogate for the always-already-becoming character: in this case, the one who despite her Jewish ancestry, presents a “Christian soul Lodg’d in a Jewish body”?<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Jessica remained a curiously malleable figure. On the British stage, various iterations of her character channeled British anxieties about how to reconcile dissenting and pro-monarchical forces. In America, pre-Revolutionary factions invoked *Merchant* as part of larger political protests against Britain.<sup>22</sup> Post-Revolutionary politicians and journalists would also use the play’s characters when debating eligibility for citizenship after the war. And proper roles of Jewish American women would remain contested terrain, particularly around issues of intermarriage and assimilation.

### “INTIMATE CONSPIRACIES”

Jessica’s fictional seduction had a colonial parallel in the real-life case of Phila Franks, daughter of a wealthy Jewish American family in New York. In 1743, only nine years before Jessica’s debut on the American stage, Phila eloped with Oliver DeLancey, an heir to the DeLancey dynasty. As her mother Abigail Franks’s letters reveal, Phila met her future husband through the Gentile financial and social networks in which her wealthy family circulated.<sup>23</sup> Despite its association with New York’s Christian elite, Phila’s family was devout, and Phila had daily Hebrew lessons in addition to other training she received to prepare her for future domestic life. She was indoctrinated in the traditions of her faith and familiar with her family’s expectations that she would marry into the Jewish community.<sup>24</sup> Her elopement destroyed those dreams. For Abigail Franks, her daughter had chosen exile from her faith and her family, and she wrote sadly, “I am determined that I never will see her nor lett none of the family goe near her.” Franks recognized, however, that in the eyes of the Christian community, Phila had made an admirable decision: “Her conduct . . . has always bin unblemished and is soe still in the

eyes of the Christians whose allow she has disoblged us, but has in noe way bin Dishonorable being married to a man of worth and character.”<sup>25</sup> Franks realized that her heartbreak would appear only a minor inconvenience to her Christian neighbors, and that they would see her daughter’s choice as a step toward salvation rather than ruin.

Like Jessica’s elopement with Lorenzo, Phila’s domestic disruptions occurred within the family sphere. They operated in the safe context of the colonial framework and pointed toward a normalizing tendency in colonial culture. By contrast, Abigail’s niece Rebecca Franks’s rebellions would take place in a more contentious environment against the backdrop of the American Revolution. As allegiances grew more fraught, the concept of seduction grew more political. Rebecca’s defiance presented an explicitly performative aspect, culminating in her participation in one of the most notorious spectacles of the war: the 1778 *Meschianza*. Before exploring Franks’s role in the *Meschianza*, it is important to note the extent to which colonists redefined their relationships with Great Britain based on the public performances of consumption in the decade before the war. With conflict looming, the colonists united in their distrust of pleasure and luxury as *British* commodities. In this context, domestic feminism could be defined by women’s public participation in boycotts of British goods by wearing homespun and sacrificing sugar, tea, and other foreign finery. Joseph Fichtelberg contends that “impersonal economic events” such as trade or the consumption of foreign products became reconfigured as “intimate conspiracies—betrayals of moral trust.”<sup>26</sup> Fichtelberg’s term “intimate conspiracies” provides a useful corollary to Ashton’s “domestic feminism,” suggesting the ways in which choices normally confined to the private sphere and women’s care emerged as unexpectedly significant. Those “intimate conspiracies” extended beyond boycotted goods in the years leading up to the Revolution. Those such as Rebecca Franks who partook in lavish entertainments or theatre-going were targeted as both weak and unpatriotic. The infamous *Meschianza* offers a full-blown spectacle of seduction, revealing the intimate conspiracies of a host of loyalist families, including Franks, who played a highly visible role in this exotic extravaganza.

Rebecca was the daughter of David Franks and a Gentile woman named Margaret Evans. Franks was not technically Jewish, since her mother was a Gentile. Yet when Margaret Evans Franks recorded Rebecca’s birth in the family Bible, she wrote that it coincided with “Good Friday & Purim.” As Jacob Rader Marcus suggests, in so doing Margaret Evans Franks “built her

own little bridge between Judaism and Christianity.”<sup>27</sup> And even though he married a Gentile, David Franks remained a participant in various Jewish enterprises in New York and Philadelphia. Thus while she may not have been a practicing Jew, Rebecca Franks’s Jewish heritage stayed visible in the immediate society in which she lived, and it became an important part of her legacy. More than a century after her death she continued to be described in the popular press as “The Beautiful Jewess [who] was Called the Princess of Her People.”<sup>28</sup>

The *Meschianza* was an elaborate pageant performed in honor of British general William Howe at the Wharton estate outside Philadelphia. The festival featured beautiful loyalist ladies honoring a host of young soldiers masquerading as their knights in shining armor. Rebecca Franks participated as one of the bevy of ladies inspiring the champions. Franks’s involvement in the *Meschianza* harks back to my earlier theme of “conspicuousness” and Manganelli’s notion of a “crisis of visibility,” as Jewish female identities were displayed for audience consumption. It also highlights Franks’s intimate conspiracy with the British occupying forces to which some of her family remained loyal. The women performing in the *Meschianza* were dressed in “Turkish” costumes, while the soldiers appeared as knights. A 1778 costume sketch of the event created by the British major John André shows a woman adorned with a pearl-draped turban topped by a small cluster of feathers. Though she wears a traditional eighteenth-century bodice, she also sports a loose jacket over her dress, perhaps to lend a more “Oriental” flair. Apparently some of the women’s costumes also included “flowing Turkish trousers.”<sup>29</sup> The scene of Franks watching her competing champions foreshadows the knightly combat showcased in *Ivanhoe*, while the lavish costume detailed in André’s sketch—resplendent with jewels, veils, and other exotic signifiers—is reflected in later portraits of Jewesses from both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>30</sup>

For the crowd of British loyalists participating in the *Meschianza*, Franks’s performance might have been read simply as a continuation of assimilationist performances enacted by generations of “Jessicas” on British and colonial stages. By contrast, for American audiences consuming the event from a distance via newspaper accounts, Franks presented a transgressive character on multiple levels. She was a woman participating in a public spectacle that flouted the tenets of self-restraint imposed by America’s wartime government (and was doing so garbed in an exotic costume that potentially ghosted her Jewish ancestry). She embodied the “Princess of her

People,” modeling a decidedly undomestic figure in a society that had ostensibly rid itself of princes and princesses during the war. Her participation defied the domestic economies being practiced by so many other patriotic women, and her conspicuous consumption alongside other loyalist women at the event confirmed her status as an “unbeliever” in the nation’s democratic experiment.<sup>31</sup>

Defining female republican “converts” on the US stage in postwar culture initially seemed synonymous with Gentile domesticity. Characters such as Maria in Royall Tyler’s *The Contrast* (1787) or Rebecca in Susanna Rowson’s *Slaves in Algiers* (1794) both provide patriotic testimonials demonstrating Christian women’s fitness to participate in a republican polity. An example of a Christian *and* republican convert appears in Rowson’s character Fetnah, the first significant female Jewish character written expressly for an American audience. She embodies postwar paradoxes of race, citizenship, and belonging. Rowson’s Fetnah is the daughter of the *renegado* Ben Hassan, a British Jew who has converted to the Muslim faith the better to ply his business with the dey of Algiers. Hassan has also sold his daughter to the dey’s harem. Despite her status as the dey’s concubine and her forced observance of the Muslim faith, Fetnah remains independent and a passionate advocate for women’s rights. She is converted to both republicanism and Christianity by her father’s prisoner, Rebecca, a change that takes place in what Malini Schueller describes as the “social space of the harem” that exists as a quasi-domestic sphere, set apart from the “society of men.”<sup>32</sup> Like a good republican woman, Fetnah rejects the “vastly pretty” baubles offered by the dey in favor of a “love of liberty.”<sup>33</sup> Her domestic feminism—her mission to free her fellow prisoners and reconcile them to their families—may unfold in a Christian context, but as Zoe Detsi-Diamante argues, Fetnah’s “invention” and “ready wit” allow her to transcend “national, racial and class boundaries,” uniting Rowson’s characters in “a context of female solidarity and collective activity.”<sup>34</sup> However, Fetnah only truly “transcends” racial boundaries because she renounces Judaism. Rowson implies that Fetnah’s Jewishness is incompatible with republican virtue. Fetnah is a heroine because she sacrifices part of her identity. Whether postwar stages could also model *Jewish* republican heroines remained unknown. Could Jewish republican motherhood “extend civic virtue” as thoroughly as Gentile republican motherhood had?<sup>35</sup> And who would embody those virtues onstage?



# "BLACK BUT COMELY"

Any consideration of changing stage types requires a brief exploration of the kinds of actresses who personated Jewish female characters. In the years before the emergence of the "Tragic Muse" Manganelli has described, how did audiences perceive the actresses who enacted female Jewish characters, including Jessica, the most regularly performed female Jewish character on early national stages?<sup>36</sup> Well into the first decades of the nineteenth century, Jessica generally fell to American actresses who specialized in ingénues. To play Jessica required singing talent and some degree of personal beauty. Critics evaluated both in determining an actress's fitness for the role, as the following brief catalogue of performers and reviews suggests.<sup>37</sup> Prior to the Revolution, popular singers (such as Miss Wainwright of the Hallam-Douglass Company) had taken the role of Jessica, along with Miss Helen Hallam.<sup>38</sup> On May 17, 1799, Mrs. Seymour played Jessica at New York's Park Theatre, joined by the vocalist Mr. Tyler, to "sing the silly songs then incrusted on the part."<sup>39</sup> One reviewer described Mrs. Darley's 1804 debut as Jessica, noting that she was "a charming little actress" with a "captivating naïveté."<sup>40</sup> The memoirs of her fellow actor, John Durang, also describe Darley as a "great singer."<sup>41</sup> The "Monthly Dramatic Review" of the Boston Theatre observed that "Mrs. Wheatley's face and figure are very pretty, and made a pleasing Jessica."<sup>42</sup> A review of Mrs. Elizabeth Arnold Poe (mother of Edgar Allan Poe) in the role of Jessica in 1809 noted that she "sung her songs with considerable effect and looked very pretty and interesting."<sup>43</sup>

None of these reviews discuss whether or not the actresses were persuasive as Jewish characters, merely whether they were spirited performers or talented singers. That *absence* of commentary is striking given the frequent references to *male* performers' degree of accuracy in personating Jews (whether they captured the dialect or mannerisms accurately). And yet audiences did share expectations about how Jewish women looked and behaved and what values or heritage they might pass on to their children.<sup>44</sup>

A noteworthy example appears in a 1934 chronicle of the life of Edgar Allan Poe. Some sources, such as Henry Morais's *The Jews of Philadelphia*, have claimed that Poe's mother, Elizabeth Arnold Poe, the "pretty and interesting" Jessica, was of Jewish descent.<sup>45</sup> Early twentieth-century biographer Una Pope-Hennessy attributed Poe's exoticism to his putative Jewish heritage:

Was there something Oriental in him? The surname of Arnold is not uncommon in Jewish annals. Many Jews were connected with the theatre. Could it be that through his mother he was of Jewish descent? When we look at her miniature we see nothing Anglo-Saxon about the little face or the liquid, gazelle-like eyes. She appears to be dark and small-boned, and almost like a Persian miniature. May we allow ourselves to account for Poe's obsession with luxurious furnishings, his descriptions of rich materials and perfumes, his Saracenic censers and his flaming tripods, his gilding, his colours, his thick, arabesque carpets, his curtained alcoves, his visions of lovely women shut away in medieval harem-like seclusion to the secret wells of racial memory and natural instinct? May not this aspect of his fantasy be a working out in drab America of the rich inheritance of Israel?<sup>46</sup>

Pope-Hennessey's speculations strike the contemporary reader as exaggerated, if not downright offensive, and they contrast sharply with the legacy that so many early Jewish American women hoped to bestow on their children: that of piety and good citizenship. Pope-Hennessey attributes Poe's fevered imagination and his inability to fit neatly in the roster of American poets to the "inheritance of Israel" bestowed by his mother. She also invokes the dark-haired, dark-eyed, exotic stereotypes that marked female Jewish characters in the Anglo-American imagination. What *was* the Jewish American mother's legacy to successive generations: a dark beauty that would identify her descendants as racial others among their fellow citizens; a flair for the exotic; or a distinctive wit and wisdom that might thrust them into the public eye and distinguish them from their more retiring Gentile sisters? Pope-Hennessey's account of Poe's mother harks back to a long tradition of authors, poets, and observers struggling to describe the fascination that Jewish women exercised over non-Jewish observers, a combination of qualities that conjured desire, revulsion, and sympathy. The paradox had appeared in early descriptions of Jewish American women. In 1744, for example, a Gentile visitor to the Samson Levy home in Philadelphia described Levy's sister Hettie as "Black but very comely."<sup>47</sup> This stereotype, inherited from the English tradition, was entangled in Americans' own internal debates about race, citizenship, and belonging in a land in which "blackness" was rapidly assuming a different association. Fifty-five years after the Hettie Levy episode, another Philadelphian, American novelist Charles Brock-

den Brown (a contemporary of Poe's mother), described the fictional Jew-ess Ascha Fielding in his novel *Arthur Mervyn* as being "tawny as a moor"; as Carol Smith-Rosenberg argues, such a characterization conjured her as "unmistakably black" in the eighteenth-century imagination. Indeed, Smith-Rosenberg suggests that Fielding's character "subverts distinctions between black and white" in a manner at once intensely seductive and bordering on the "grotesque."<sup>48</sup>

Both the real-life Hettie and the fictional Ascha appeared as racial "others" to those who encountered them and thus were sources of unease to the same spectators who found themselves enchanted by the women's vivacity and learning. The Gentile visitor to the Levys' acknowledged that Hettie possessed great charm, wit, and erudition *despite* her swarthy complexion and "coal black" hair. And Brown reminds his readers that "no creature ever had more power to bewitch" than Ascha.<sup>49</sup> Praise for the Jewish woman's wit and wisdom became almost as familiar as remarks about her dark or exotic beauty. Some authors, puzzling over "why the women of the Jewish race were so much handsomer than the men," even speculated that Jewish women's beauty was a heavenly reward for not taunting Christ during his trial and crucifixion.<sup>50</sup>

As Roberta Mock argues, some Jewish women were able to "pass' in/as part of the dominant culture."<sup>51</sup> Passing in this dominant culture (white and Christian) was both a valuable and precarious asset in nineteenth-century America, since successful passing could subvert contemporary understandings of whiteness or Christianity. The career of "Miss Solomon" offers an instance of an audience embracing a Jewish female performer as a symbol of American girlhood *without* qualifying that belonging based on her heritage.<sup>52</sup> The eldest daughter of the Solomon acting family, Miss Solomon took to the stage at a very young age, and by 1794 had achieved sufficient fame as a child star that a poem dedicated to her appeared in the *Philadelphia Minerva*. Describing her as a "lisp[ing] tuner of Apollo's lyre," the author wished that her "skill might improve as thou increase in age / And prove the wonder of Columbia's stage."<sup>53</sup> She continued her career into the nineteenth century and often performed with noted American dancer John Durang. On July 7, 1802, she appeared as part of a tableau titled "The Federal Oath, or The Independence of 1776." Amid a scene of general revelry, with the songs "Jefferson's March" and "'Tis Liberty, Dear Liberty" playing in the background, Miss Solomon embodied one of the Spirits of the Revolution.<sup>54</sup>

Miss Solomon's emergence on the national stage as a star performer, one

hailed as a symbol of “Columbia,” invites speculation as to how a young actress of Jewish descent could come to embody “American” artistry and virtue in a culture with long-standing anxieties about how to reconcile Jewish and American identities. Was she able to pass among Gentile members of the theatre companies and audiences she worked with, or did audiences make a distinction between identities when they watched her? As William Pencak notes, late eighteenth-century Americans understood Judaism in two ways: “as a religion which could be changed, and as an ethnic or national affiliation which could not.”<sup>55</sup> Perhaps in Miss Solomon’s case her American birth trumped any hint of Jewish heritage? The paucity of evidence surrounding her later career makes it difficult to argue one way or the other, but the way critics described her, in contrast to those actresses they labeled as “black-eyed Jewesses” or “almost . . . Persian” or a “Jewish artist of distinction” hints that for whatever reason, she “passed” successfully into the footnotes of theatre history, unmarked by comments that linked her stage presence to Jewishness.

Yet unsuccessful passing could also plunge the perpetrator into danger. Indeed, “passing” recurs as a motif for Jewish female characters in nineteenth-century drama. As Manganelli notes, the character of the “Jewess” appeared neither wholly white nor wholly other but could expose the performances of both, offering a figure upon which observers could project their basest desires or most noble qualities.<sup>56</sup> For example, in 1856, Nathaniel Hawthorne chronicled his “repugnance” toward and fascination with a young Jewish woman he met in England (a woman who would later inspire the character of Miriam in his work “The Marble Faun”). Describing her as “dark and yet not dark,” he claimed that “looking at her, I saw what were the wives of the old patriarchs, in their maiden or early married days—what Rachel was, when Jacob wooed her seven years, and seven more—what Judith was; for, womanly as she looked, I doubt not she could have slain a man, in a good cause—what Bathsheba was; only she seemed to have no sin in her—perhaps what Eve was, though one could hardly think her weak enough to eat the apple.”<sup>57</sup> The Jewess’s racial status created a dangerous visibility, threatening to overwhelm more individual characteristics.

### “THEY CANNOT LEARN ANYTHING JEWISH”

Throughout the late eighteenth century and well into the first decades of the nineteenth century, many Jewish American women struggled to raise

their children in the midst of an alien culture. Virginian Rebecca Samuel mourned, "It is sinful that such blessed children should be brought up there . . . [where] they cannot learn anything . . . Jewish."<sup>58</sup> For Samuels, sustaining traditions proved problematic in this new country: "Jewishness is pushed aside here. . . . We do not know what the Sabbath and holidays are."<sup>59</sup> As Hasia R. Diner and Beryl Lieff Benderly observe, Samuels' experience was a fairly typical one, particularly among smaller Jewish communities that lacked resources to educate citizens in familiar rituals. Absent requisite officials or materials, it was often difficult for women to keep kosher homes, to observe the Sabbath, to have a proper *mikvah* (ritual bath), or to send their children for religious training. Moreover, without an established hierarchy of religious leaders among the smaller towns where scattered groups of Jewish Americans lived, prayer circles met in family homes, stores, or other improvised sites, and Jewish Americans had to debate important theological questions without a rabbi's guidance.<sup>60</sup> Samuels feared that without adequate moral and spiritual education, Jewish mothers would not be able to raise their children as Jews.<sup>61</sup>

The proper religious instruction of children played out on nineteenth-century stages and in nineteenth-century fiction. Several early examples argue for women's roles in promoting religious tolerance between Jews and Gentiles. For example, Thomas Dibdin's popular *The Jew and Doctor*, which debuted in American playhouses in 1800, promotes religious tolerance through a female character named Emily, raised by a Jewish man named Abednego. He rescues the little foundling child, raises her as his foster daughter, and even provides her with a dowry of £5,000. In an early scene in the play, he explains why he chose to educate his adopted daughter as a Christian rather than as a Jew:

ABEDNEGO: Vel, ma tear, I vas vaken one morning out of ma sleep with de cry of a shild in de passage of ma lodging; and ven I saw it, it look'd for all de vorld so it was an angel—

EMILY: Ah, Sir!

ABED.: So I took it up, and ax'd all over de place whose little shild it vas—All de people he laugh at me, and said vat it vas my own, and I wanted to sheat'em, and dat I vas a Jew, and wou'd take in te devil; but I told dem I vould take in noting but de shild. So I took pity upon you, ma tear, for I remembered ven I vas a poor little poy myself, and sold rollers a top o' the street.

EMILY: Was there anything besides the jewel with me?

ABED.: There vas some paper mit your name upon it, which said, this shild is christened Emily—And as for de clothes vat vas mit you, I suppose they wou'd fetch about five guineas, and the basket I sold myself for a rattle out of the toyman's shop for you—for I always minded the main chance—So I prought you to England and put you to a Christian school; for, as your father and mother made you a Christian, for vat I shou'd make you a Jew, my tear?<sup>62</sup>

Abednego's refusal to force Emily's conversion to Judaism, combined with his charitable conduct, provides an important model for Emily in how to raise her own children beyond religious prejudices. In the case of *The Jew and Doctor*, an American audience might imagine that the Jewish male character supports freedom of religion, while the Jewish/Christian female character demonstrates that the two faiths can productively coexist. The play points to the female character as the one who brokers religious peace in the home.

Hannah More's playlet *Moses in the Bulrushes* offers another example of alternate roles being modeled for Jewish American mothers in the first decades of the nineteenth century. More's drama rehearses themes familiar to early nineteenth-century American women: their responsibility to nurture future generations of moral citizens. More was a British playwright, abolitionist, political pamphleteer, and poet whose writings circulated through the United States in both political and educational circles. *Moses in the Bulrushes* proved popular enough to be reprinted by Isaiah Thomas in Boston in 1813.<sup>63</sup> More's drama was likely intended for performances at Sunday schools or at ladies' academies. It features no male roles, only the princess of Egypt, her servant, Moses's mother (Jochebed), and Moses's sister (Miriam).<sup>64</sup> The play focuses on the sufferings all mothers experience for their children. As Jochebed moans, "Ye who have sons only can know my pangs! None else can guess them. A mother's sorrows cannot be conceived but by a mother."<sup>65</sup> Placing Moses in the basket before sending him down to the river, she laments, "Let me not see him—spare my heart that pang. Yet sure one little look may be indulged, one kiss—perhaps the last.—No more my soul, that fondness would be fatal—I should keep him. I could not doom to death the babe I clasped. Did ever mother kill her sleeping boy?"<sup>66</sup>

In More's text—written by a woman, to be performed by women, and likely before an audience largely made up of women and girls—Jochebed's

words and actions speak at once to a sense of community *and* to a need for women to stand up against oppression and wrongdoing. Jochebed defies the law by saving Moses, but she does so to answer a higher calling: motherhood. As Penny Bradshaw observes, More's drama "does not actually deviate from the biblical version but in retelling the story as a female-orientated drama and empathetically engaging with the female characters, she emphasizes the pivotal role played by the women and moves their collaboration and virtues to the center of the story's meaning."<sup>67</sup> At the end of the play, the Egyptian princess rescues Moses and fetches Jochebed to serve as his nurse. While Jochebed initially resists seeing her son raised by those who worship "gross idolatries," she relents when Miriam reassures her that "Thou shalt pour into his infant mind the purest precepts of the purest faith."<sup>68</sup> Miriam's dialogue echoes the lessons More expresses elsewhere in her writings on women's education: "On you depend, in no small degree, the principles of the whole rising generation."<sup>69</sup> Though originally written for a British audience, it was adopted by American educators. And the question it raises of whether a woman could be both Jewish and a virtuous American citizen would continue to resurface in literature and on the American stage throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century, as would the role of Jewish women in educating future generations of American youth. Like Dibdin's *The Jew and Doctor*, More's drama offered morals that could be read by both Jews and Gentiles, since each foregrounded lessons of religious tolerance.

How women modeled religious tolerance appears as the cornerstone of the animated correspondence between Jewish American educator Rachel Mordecai and the British educator and novelist Maria Edgeworth. Though the two ladies never met, their initial debates over Edgeworth's representation of Jewish characters in her fiction prompted not only a change of heart on Edgeworth's part, but a decades-long exchange of ideas on religion and education. Thanks to Mordecai, Edgeworth renounced her anti-Jewish bias through her novel *Harrington*, and, most significant for this study, she used a scene at the theatre to effect the main character's transformation from anti-Semitism to tolerance.

Edgeworth was a proponent of Enlightenment ideals in teaching, which appear in her 1798 work *Practical Education*. As a family of educators, the Mordecais promoted many of Edgeworth's principles. In 1815, however, Rachel Mordecai felt compelled to write to Edgeworth to protest her depiction of a Jewish character in Edgeworth's story *The Absentee*. She complained:



I would ask, how can it be, that she who on all other subjects shews such justice and liberality, should on one appear biased by prejudice; should even instill that prejudice into the minds of youth. . . . It is to the species of character, which wherever a Jew is introduced, is invariably attached to him. Can it be believed, that this race of men are by nature mean, avaricious, unprincipled? Forbid it, mercy. Yet this is more than insinuated by the stigma usually affixed to the name. . . . In this happy country where religious distinctions are scarcely known, where character and talent are all sufficient to attain advancement, we find the Jews to form a respectable part of the community.<sup>70</sup>

Edgeworth's response was the 1817 novel *Harrington*. In the book's preface, her father writes that the work was inspired "by an extremely well-written letter . . . from a Jewish Lady, complaining of the illiberality with which the Jewish nation has been treated in some of Miss Edgeworth's works."<sup>71</sup> The novel's title character, Harrington, is a lifelong anti-Semite. In the opening pages of the story, he attributes his anti-Jewish bias to horrific tales his nurse told him of "Simon the Jew" who carried off naughty boys, and of a French Jewish pie maker who sold pork pies that were actually made from the flesh and blood of murdered children.<sup>72</sup> Edgeworth resurrects familiar stereotypes of Jews as the bogeymen that inspire Harrington's prejudice, and while she does not dismiss his childhood fears, she highlights both the absurdity of the nurse's claims *and* underscores the importance of proper, rational education for children. As Harrington says:

In our enlightened days, and in the present improved state of education, it may appear incredible that any nursery-maid could be so wicked as to relate, or any child of six years old so foolish as to credit, such tales; but I am speaking of what happened many years ago . . . and in further proof of the progress of human knowledge and reason, we may recollect that many of these very stories of the Jews, which we now hold too preposterous for the infant and the nursery-maid to credit, were some centuries ago universally believed by the English nation, and had furnished more than one of our kings with pretexts for extortion and massacres.<sup>73</sup>

As an adult, Harrington experiences a sentimental conversion that shocks him out of his anti-Jewish sentiments when he watches a female audience

member that he identifies as Jewish during a production of *The Merchant of Venice*. Harrington confesses that "My imagination formed such a strong conception of the pain the Jewess was feeling, and my inverted sympathy . . . overpowered my direct and natural feelings."<sup>74</sup> Here, anti-Semitic stage stereotypes underscore the damaging effects of anti-Jewish sentiment; Harrington forms a sympathetic bond with the beautiful Berenice as he watches her suffer in the crowded playhouse. As he grows more and more enamored of Berenice, he also becomes better acquainted with her father, Mr. Montenero, described as "a Spanish or American Jew."<sup>75</sup> When Harrington questions Mr. Montenero about Berenice's emotional response to *The Merchant of Venice*, Montenero explains: "There are reasons why she was peculiarly touched and moved by that exhibition. Till she came to Europe—to England—she was not aware, at least not practically aware, of the strong prepossessions which still prevail against us Jews."<sup>76</sup> Montenero attributes his daughter's innocence to her having lived "in a happy part of that country [America], where religious distinctions are scarcely known—where characters and talents are all sufficient to attain advancement—where the Jews form a respectable part of the community—where, in most instances, they are liberally educated, many following the honourable professions of law and physic with credit and ability, and associating with the best society that country affords."<sup>77</sup>

Montenero's words are copied almost verbatim from Mordecai's 1815 letter to Edgeworth. Rachel Mordecai had written, "In this happy country where religious distinctions are scarcely known, where character and talent are all sufficient to attain advancement, we find the Jews to form a respectable part of the community."<sup>78</sup> Additionally, Edgeworth adds a description of the Monteneros' American experience that might have been gleaned from descriptions of the Mordecais' lifestyle in rural North Carolina that Rachel shared in her letters: "Living in a retired village, her father's the only family of Israelites who resided in or near it, all her juvenile friendships and attachments had been formed with those of different persuasions; yet each had looked upon the variations of the other as things of course, or rather as things which do not affect the moral character—differences which take place in every society."<sup>79</sup>

Rachel Mordecai found *Harrington* a much more palatable interpretation of Jewish identity, as she observed in a letter to Edgeworth on October 28, 1817: "We have read . . . *Harrington* . . . with much satisfaction." Mordecai compared Edgeworth's interpretation of Jewishness to other portray-

als then dominating the stage and popular fiction: "The portrait of Mr. Montinero [*sic*] is rendered the more gratifying by its contrast with even the very few Israelites who have, in fictitious writings, been represented as estimable. I have met with none that I recollect but Cumberland's Sheva. And in Sheva, tho' we find much to approve, there is still a want of respectability. He was a benevolent man, but in the profession of a usurer, there is something against which correct principle revolts. Mr. Montinero [*sic*] is a good man. A man of science, and a gentleman whose acquaintance and intimacy anyone might covet."<sup>80</sup>

However, Mordecai expressed her surprise at one twist in Edgeworth's tale: "Let me therefore without dwelling any longer on its many excellences, confess with frankness that in one event I was disappointed. Berenice was not a Jewess." She commented, "I have endeavored to discover Miss E's motive for not suffering her to remain such; it appeared that there must be another, besides that of the obstacle it presented to her union with Harrington." After describing a lengthy debate among her family, she declares,

I have at length adopted an opinion suggested by my dear father, that this circumstance was intended as additional proof of the united liberality and firmness of Mr. Montinero's [*sic*] principles. He had married a lady of a different religious persuasion without being inclined to swerve in the least from his own; and he had brought up his daughter in the belief of her mother, but with an equal regard for both religions; inculcating thereby, the principle, that provided the heart is sincere in its adoration. The conduct governed by justice, benevolence, morality, the modes of faith and forms of worship are immaterial.<sup>81</sup>

Mordecai imputes Edgeworth's choice to a wish to demonstrate equality among diverse religious faiths rather than the triumph of the one over the other. On June 21, 1821, Edgeworth responded to Mordecai, "I wish you would thank your kindhearted father for the reason he gave for my making Berenice turn out to be a Christian. It was a better reason than I own I had ever thought of."<sup>82</sup> Edgeworth's confession that she had not been motivated by notions of religious tolerance in making Berenice a Christian is telling. Earlier in the novel she notes that while it is fairly common in America for Jews and Christians to intermarry without one or the other of the spouses converting, it is not a regular practice in England.<sup>83</sup> In *Harrington* she makes it a test of faith and tolerance. If Harrington will marry Berenice *despite* her

Jewish roots, then not only has he demonstrated his worthiness, he can be rewarded with Mr. Montenero's revelation: "I have tried you to the utmost, and am satisfied both of the steadiness of your principles and of the strength of your attachment to my daughter—Berenice is not a Jewess. . . . Had I spared you the pain, you would never have enjoyed the delight; had I spared you the trial, you would never have had the triumph—the triumph, did I say? Better than all triumph, this sober certainty of your own integrity."<sup>84</sup>

The drama of Montenero's confession paves the way for Harrington and Berenice's life of domestic bliss. Moreover, Berenice has successfully transplanted American ideals of religious tolerance to British soil. She and Harrington will (presumably) combine Old and New World sensibilities to rear a more just generation. Yet ultimately the revelation of her Gentile identity suggests that Berenice's earlier pain at witnessing the treatment of Shylock and Jessica onstage was an example of Christian empathy rather than Jewish suffering. Like Fetnah in *Slaves in Algiers* or Emily in *The Jew and Doctor*, although she symbolizes feminine virtue and religious tolerance, her heroism and goodness are implicitly linked to her identity as a Christian. Even while Berenice represents a significant step in presenting a female character able to model acceptance of different faiths, she raises the question of when authors and playwrights would let a female Jewish character take the spotlight.

While playwrights continued to wrestle with depictions of "genuine" Jewish American women, elsewhere Americans witnessed open and effective performances of Jewish women's faith and virtue. The ways in which these women *embodied* Jewish feminine identities present useful contrasts to their fictional counterparts. Below I examine a collection of real-life Jewish American women who stepped boldly to center stage, fearlessly proclaiming their faith and their political beliefs in a series of very public performances.

### "AN ATMOSPHERE OF LOVE AND SWEETNESS"

As a prologue to these examples, I begin with an event that took place one evening in 1818 at the Charleston Theatre. That night the audience beheld a spectacle that left them enraptured. It was not a new play, a new actress, or even new scenery. It was Fanny Yates Levy, the foreign bride of Jacob Clavius Levy. According to a popular Charleston legend, she was so lovely that when she made her first appearance in the dress circle of the city's theatre, "the whole house rose in tribute to her matchless beauty."<sup>85</sup> Levy's debut in the

playhouse echoes other moments in which Jewish spectators in the theatre drew an audience's attention, whether during the controversy over the "Jew Bill" in Georgian England or the imagined encounter between Berenice and Harrington in Edgeworth's novel. While Levy's does not seem to have been the kind of dangerous visibility other Jewish women (real or fictional) experienced when emerging into the public eye, her debut at the Charleston Theatre linked the presentation of her beauty and her Jewish identity in the public imagination. And while the story of the entire audience rising to see her may be exaggerated, it suggests a closely knit, theatre-going population, one well-attuned to any variation in or addition to its well-established circle.

But Levy's playhouse triumph was only the beginning of a series of conquests in her adopted land. A social and domestic success, her admirers claimed that Fanny Yates Levy diffused around her "an atmosphere of love and sweetness." According to Stuart Samuel's history of the Yates family, she "was foremost in every good and charitable work, and the acknowledged head of the best Jewish society."<sup>86</sup> She and Jacob raised a family of seven children, all while taking an active part in the spiritual and cultural activities of their community. Levy modeled the kind of classic republican mother who carefully indoctrinated her children in both religious and patriotic observance.

The family's connections to theatre culture would eventually extend beyond simple attendance at the playhouse. Daughter Eugenia Levy Phillips frequently hosted amateur theatrical evenings. According to popular report, Fanny's granddaughter and great-niece were "brilliant amateur players with a local reputation" who on one occasion delighted the Prince of Wales and President Buchanan with a private performance at the White House. And some thirty-eight years after his mother's stunning debut in the Charleston theatre box, Jacob and Fanny's son, Samuel Yates Levy, gained modest notoriety as a playwright for *The Italian Bride* (1856), a drama he penned for actress Eliza Logan.<sup>87</sup>

While Levy's daughters in particular appear to have inherited her wit and much of her beauty, they earned also a reputation for outspokenness that diverged sharply from their mother's ladylike demeanor. Jacob and Fanny Levy were pillars of the rising Confederacy, and the family's loyalty to the South produced a dangerous visibility at times, particularly for their daughter Eugenia, who defied traditional women's roles.<sup>88</sup> Like her mother before her, Eugenia Levy Phillips emerged from the purely private sphere into a hybrid space of domestic feminism, where her activities as a hostess

of musical concerts, amateur theatricals, and other gatherings (sometimes for the benefit of the Confederate cause) offered her an unanticipated and dangerous role on the national political stage.

Eugenia Levy Phillips (wife of Congressman Phillip Phillips) became a well-known society hostess who leveraged her popularity on behalf of the Confederate cause. Union authorities arrested her twice during the war. On one occasion, General Benjamin Butler took exception to Phillips's public performance of defiance, when, on June 29, 1862, she openly laughed and cheered during the funeral procession for a Union soldier. For this crime of public disrespect, staged from the balcony of her home in full view of the city streets, Butler labeled Phillips "an uncommon, bad, and dangerous woman," and sentenced her to prison.<sup>89</sup> This only increased her popularity among fellow Southerners, who awarded her "an ovation" when she and her husband stopped in their former home city of Mobile while *en route* to their wartime refuge in Georgia.<sup>90</sup> They offered other tributes as well: Mary Chesnut hailed the "beautiful and clever Jewess" for her bravery, and William Garrett boasted that her "proud Southern spirit never failed."<sup>91</sup> For Southern loyalists Chesnut and Garrett at least, Phillips's Jewishness may have remained a visible aspect of her identity, but it proved no bar to her Southern patriotism.

Phillips was not the only Jewish Confederate female loyalist to stage a public performance of her beliefs. Actress Adah Isaacs Menken reportedly declared her allegiance to the South during a sojourn in Baltimore (where she was performing at the Front Street Theatre). She was hauled in front of Union authorities, questioned, and ordered to moderate her rhetoric or face imprisonment and/or expulsion from the state. Menken's proclamations of loyalty—which were variously rumored to include painting her dressing room Confederate gray, raising a Confederate flag in her hotel room during her tour of California, hanging portraits of Jefferson Davis in her home, etc.—were all done with what Daphne Brooks terms a "brash and capricious" eye toward attracting public attention.<sup>92</sup> While her social status as a performer placed her beyond the domestic sphere that Phillips occupied, it seems telling that her "performances" of Southern patriotism were often staged not before the footlights, but in what passed for *her* domestic spaces (dressing rooms or hotel rooms during her tours).

Unlike Menken, neither Fanny nor Eugenia was a professional performer, but they each appear to have been active play-goers who also understood the power of enacting a particular version of Southern womanhood, just as

Menken did.<sup>93</sup> I am struck by the curious—if obviously unintentional—parallels between Fanny Yates Levy's presentation in the balcony above the Charleston theatre audience and her daughter's public appearance on a balcony above the city streets of New Orleans. Each performance produced an intense visibility. Each performance cemented the reputation of the protagonist. While Levy's memorialized her as an icon of femininity, her daughter's crystalized her reputation as a Southern heroine.

I return to a question I asked earlier in this chapter: Could a Jewess be a heroine? The examples of Fetnah in *Slaves in Algiers*, Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*, Emily in *The Jew and Doctor*, and Berenice in *Harrington* imply that true Jewish female heroism was not *Jewish* at all, as each of the heroines in question was either revealed to have been secretly Gentile or converted from Judaism. The praise heaped on social leader Eugenia Levy Phillips, "the beautiful and clever Jewess," however, suggests that by the middle of the nineteenth century, more Americans could reconcile Jewish identity with female patriotism. How had such a change emerged in the culture? What stage images, actresses, fictional characters, or real-life role models had helped to shift the dialogue on Jewish American women between Fanny Yates's appearance in the Charleston theatre and her daughter's performance on a balcony in New Orleans? In the next section, I examine the intersections (and occasional collisions) of real-life Jewish women with the fictional and dramatic models that contributed to their education in the 1820s through the 1850s. I am intrigued not only by the ways in which playwrights and authors drew on Jewish women's experiences (real or imagined) for inspiration, but by the familiarity that Jewish American women demonstrated with the theatrical and fictional conventions that shaped their viewing and reading practices.

#### "BY ALL THAT'S DEAR TO FEMALE PURITY"

The most obvious real-life role model for Jewish American womanhood in the 1820s was Rebecca Gratz of Philadelphia. Much has been written of Gratz's pioneering philanthropic work during a long life devoted to her family, her faith, and to educating and caring for those less fortunate. And as the widely reputed inspiration for Sir Walter Scott's Jewess Rebecca in his acclaimed 1820 novel *Ivanhoe*, Gratz became the nexus of both factual and fictional constructions of Jewish American female identity. Scott's nov-



el spawned dozens of stage adaptations that proliferated in the American theatre for the next seventy years and that purported to “educate” Gentiles about Jewish female characters.<sup>94</sup>

The novel centers on the adventures of a young Saxon hero (Ivanhoe), returning in disguise to his kingdom after long service in the Crusades. He encounters treachery at every turn, except at the hands of Rebecca and her father, Isaac, known as the “Jew of York.” Ivanhoe saves Isaac, and Rebecca later saves Ivanhoe’s life. Though he is betrothed to the beautiful Saxon Rowena, Ivanhoe falls in love with Rebecca, as does the evil Sir Brian de Bois Guilbert. Sir Brian tries to force Rebecca to convert and marry him, but she refuses and is tried for witchcraft for “seducing” a Christian knight. She is saved at the last moment, leaving her with a painful decision. While Rebecca and Ivanhoe clearly love each other, the religious and cultural heritage she refuses to deny represents an insurmountable obstacle between them. She leaves Ivanhoe because she cannot assimilate into his world without renouncing her faith. While audiences may regret her decision, the story also encourages them to admire her steadfast adherence to her principles.

Characters based on Rebecca Gratz/Scott’s Rebecca served as key sources (or points of comparison) for many major stage interpretations of the Jewess, both in America and abroad. Indeed, in 1824, seven years after the publication of her novel *Harrington*, Edgeworth wrote to Mordecai asking about the character: “I forget whether in any of your letters you ever mentioned to me a novel of Sir W. Scott’s *Ivanhoe* in which there is a charming Jewess Rebecca—pray tell me again, even if you have told me once, how you like her.”<sup>95</sup> Knowing Rachel Mordecai’s sensitivity to representations of Jewish women in fiction, it hardly seems surprising that Edgeworth would turn to her friend for an assessment of the accuracy of Scott’s character. Edgeworth was not the only one to question whether the character did justice to the image of Jewish womanhood. On April 4, 1820, Rebecca Gratz had written to her sister-in-law asking, “Have you received *Ivanhoe*? When you have read it, tell me what you think of my namesake, Rebecca.”<sup>96</sup> Within a year of Gratz’s letter, dramatized versions of the story had debuted in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New Orleans.<sup>97</sup> If Gratz did indeed inspire the character in Scott’s novel, then audiences around the country were seeing their first *American* Jewish woman depicted on the stage (even if she arrived in a roundabout way), rather than a British version adapted to suit American tastes. Various dramatic incarnations of Rebecca would dominate the theatrical repertoire over the next thirty years.

As Gratz's biographer Dianne Ashton has noted, however, the legacy of Scott's fictional Rebecca has, to a large degree, overwhelmed and sentimentalized much of what is known of her putative American namesake. Gratz was an active participant in Philadelphia's literary and cultural circles—a woman who had connections to the theatre as both a spectator and as a prominent social figure acquainted with its greatest stars. For example, her letters to her niece Miriam Cohen describe exchanging calls with actress Fanny Kemble, as well as her impressions of star performer Thomas Abthorpe Cooper.<sup>98</sup> Gratz also created the first Jewish Sunday School in America, a female benevolent society, and numerous other charitable enterprises. Ashton notes that Gratz's earlier biographers tended to de-emphasize her intellectual pursuits and accomplishments in their efforts to draw parallels between Gratz's lifelong spinsterhood and the fictional Rebecca's courageous renunciation of a love affair with a Christian. In so doing, those biographers ignore the larger ideological issues that Jewish women often faced in the mid-nineteenth century. Scott's Rebecca struggles with the question of national identity throughout both the novel and many of the various stage adaptations of the story. She finally forsakes the country that refuses to grant her the rights of citizenship. In this, the fictional Rebecca resembles her real-life namesake, since Gratz was not only a woman of deep faith, but of firm patriotism. Her letters reflected frequently on what it meant to unite her Jewish identity with her American one. Like her fictive counterpart, Rebecca Gratz represented a movement away from an assimilationist model toward a *separate* female Jewish identity that would have to be at least codefined with a national one. As Jewish American women such as Gratz engaged in activism and educational enterprises beyond the private sphere, they rendered themselves more visible to a public that had been conditioned by dramatic and popular literature to see the Jewish female body as an exotic spectacle. I have noted the ways Jessica and Fetnah presented images of desirable Jewish women. Scott's Rebecca proved no exception. Jewish female bodies had long been contentious sites on the British and American stages. As Ellen Schiff and Kimberly Manganelli note, the exotic quality of the stage Jewess's beauty rendered such characters extremely vulnerable.<sup>99</sup> Various stage descriptions of Scott's Rebecca suggest that she presented a tantalizingly "available" body on the stage. For example, while *Ivanhoe's* Christian heroine Rowena is described as costumed in blue, white, and rose (colors often associated with the Virgin Mary), Rebecca is presented in gold gauze, a turban, and, as Scott's novel and successive playwrights were careful to note, in an *unbuttoned* blouse that revealed the tops of her breasts.<sup>100</sup>

Her exotic appearance attracts the unwanted attention from male characters, as in the case of Sir Brian. In the attempted rape scene, one of the most famous episodes in the play, Sir Brian corners the captured Rebecca. This melodramatic moment merits a closer look for what it reveals about early nineteenth-century perceptions of Jewish female sexuality and agency. In this scene (later burlesqued as Rebecca battling Sir Brian in a boxing ring), Sir Brian has trapped Rebecca and her father in a lonely castle. As he enters, she pleads for release, offering him all her jewels. Sir Brian answers, "Sweet flower of Palestine, these pearls are orient, but yield to thee in fairness—these diamonds are brilliant, but cannot match thine eyes." According to the stage direction, he throws off his cloak. Rebecca cries in alarm, "Sir Brian! What wouldst thou have of me if not my wealth?" He answers, "Thou art the captive of my bow and spear, nor will I abate my right." The stage directions note that during this time he is "advancing to her." He tells her, "One thing alone can save thee; renounce thy faith, and thou shalt hence as Brian's lawful wife." Rebecca responds with scorn: "Renounce my faith for one which harbours such a votary! I scorn and I defy thee—the father of my faith can open an escape for his daughter even from this den of shame!" The stage directions read: "MUSIC—she throws open the window and steps out onto the battlement of the castle wall," and the following exchange occurs:

REBECCA: Templar, I am on the highest rampart of the castle—advance one step and I plunge to the horrid depth below, and this body shall be crushed upon the stones beneath them ere it become thy victim.

SIR BRIAN: Rebecca, by the earth—by the sea—by the sky—

REBECCA: If thou advance one foot, by all that's dear to female purity, I will perform my threat.

SIR BRIAN: Nay, hold thy dreadful purpose.<sup>101</sup>

The stage directions interrupt once more: "MUSIC and loud alarms. As he extends his arms towards her, she leans forward as if to put her purpose in execution, and the scene closes."<sup>102</sup> The stage Rebecca chooses death before either dishonor or renunciation of her faith, offering an evocative glimpse into *imagined* Jewish female agency in the early nineteenth century.<sup>103</sup>

Although the scene described above showcases a melodramatic extreme and provides a sharp contrast to Rebecca Gratz's eminently respectable persona, first- and second-generation women in prominent Jewish American families *did* wrestle with the stereotype of submissiveness and the pressure

for conversion presented in so many of the dramas on the early national stage that I have described.<sup>104</sup> They also struggled with the profound sense of isolation that Rebecca's peril communicates so clearly. In a land in which, as Rebecca Samuels had mourned in the 1790s, "Jewishness is pushed aside," where could the Jewish American woman find a sense of community and affirmation of her faith? While Jewish American men built strong connections through the synagogue or institutions such as the Society for the Visitation of the Sick and Mutual Assistance (1813), Jewish American women often lacked a community outside the home (or the galleries of the synagogue) that could allow them to forge a stronger sense of Jewish American identity. Though some, like Rebecca Gratz, participated in nonsectarian charities such as the Philadelphia Orphan Asylum in the early 1810s, it was not until the founding of organizations such as Philadelphia's Female Hebrew Benevolent Society in 1819 that Jewish American women could begin to rethink their roles as citizens in the new nation. As Hasia R. Diner and Beryl Lieff Benderly suggest, "These women remained Jewish by becoming wholeheartedly American," and their participation in these charitable and educational organizations allowed them to develop their communities and support their faith.<sup>105</sup> The Female Hebrew Benevolent Society and the successors it inspired demanded that their members define *their own* vision of an ideal Jewish American culture. They created groups that aided destitute women and children, provided both secular and religious education, and helped to place working-class women in jobs that would give them financial security.<sup>106</sup> In 1849, the Hebrew Ladies' Sewing Society of Philadelphia distributed over 550 garments to the poor, and the New York Ladies Sewing Association of the Congregation Shearith Israel made more than 870 garments. While making garments for the poor sounds like a typically domestic occupation, the distribution of these items would involve the female volunteers in excursions beyond the private sphere and encounters with all different levels of society. By 1850, the New York chapter of the society boasted sixty-seven members, and Jewish American newspapers regularly reported on successes of smaller societies around the country, such as those in Cincinnati, New Orleans, Charleston, Savannah, and elsewhere.

Activities of Jewish American women's charities drew increasing public recognition and praise, including that of two of the nation's largest early Jewish newspapers, *The Occident* and *The Israelite*. For example, in 1850, *The Occident* published the *Annual Report of the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society of Philadelphia*, which had been working closely with the Fuel and Sewing

Societies of the city. As its editor Isaac Leeser proclaimed, "From the continent of Europe many destitute immigrants are flocking to our shores, whom the horrors of war have driven from their home . . . [and] we cannot but rejoice that the spirit of Judaism is spreading its influence through various channels." He declared that the long-term goal of the society was to build a foster home for Jewish children, "wherein future artisans and mechanics will be reared to bless another generation."<sup>107</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, Jewish American women might contrast the desperate isolation and childlessness of fictive characters such as Jessica, Fetnah, Berenice, and Rebecca with examples of Jewish women's solidarity and with their roles as guardians of rising generations of Jewish American children.

Beyond the charitable organizations fueling Jewish American women's domestic feminism from the 1820s to the 1860s, the literary works of Jewish women poets, including US-born Penina Moise and British-born Grace Aguilar, had begun to inspire "ordinary" Jewish American women to share their thoughts on faith, citizenship, and women's duties with audiences beyond their families.<sup>108</sup> Moise's religious songs, some of which she wrote in her role as superintendent of the Charleston Jewish Sunday School, would later enter the canon of Jewish American hymnbooks, and her poetry continually affirmed her patriotism, including her passionate loyalty to the Confederacy in the later years of her life.<sup>109</sup>

While Moise's poetry focused on faith and nationalism, Aguilar's often presented a broader historical perspective, sometimes combined with a detailed discussion of domestic duties. As Rebecca Gratz prophesied, Aguilar's writings on Jewish women's history would challenge "the impression so much insisted on that women were little considered or cared for by the ancient people. Christians boast that the Gospel has done so much for women, yet in the New Testament I do not know a character so elevated as Deborah, or so lovely and loving as Ruth."<sup>110</sup> Gratz's niece Miriam Cohen corresponded with Aguilar, and Cohen solicited copies of Aguilar's works to sell at an 1843 Ladies Aid Fair to benefit the synagogue in Savannah. The two women also debated the issue of religious reform sweeping through so many Jewish American congregations. But in addition to serious matters of religion, they also discussed their mutual appreciation of the theatre, including, in one letter from 1846, Aguilar's praise for Charlotte Cushman's recent tour of England: "I have had the gratification of enjoying some American talent in seeing Miss Cushman. . . . I never was more delighted nor more painfully affected. The play [*Ion*] is such a favorite of mine, and having read it thro'

four or five times I was half fearful that the ideal which I had formed myself could not be embodied, but it was most perfectly. . . . I assure you American talent is fully and affectionately appreciated in England."<sup>111</sup> As Aguilar's, Cohen's, and Gratz's correspondence indicates, Jewish American women were beginning to engage in *multiple* realms outside the home, whether as leaders of religious charities or informed audience members in the playhouse. And like the Mordecai sisters of a decade before, Aguilar, Cohen, and Gratz all imagined themselves as educated theatrical consumers with a *right* to be present in the playhouse.

From the 1820s to the 1860s, Jewish American newspapers also began to recognize women as both viable consumers *and* potential producers of cultural content. In addition to *The Occident* and *The Israelite*, *Die Deborah* inspired new visions of Jewish women's domestic feminism that reflected both Gratz's activism and Moise's and Aguilar's writings. *Die Deborah*, Isaac Wise's 1855 German-language newspaper, offers the best-known example of a Jewish American periodical catering specifically to female audiences. Wise, the well-known Cincinnati-based reformer, hailed Jewish women as "priestesses of the home" and outlined duties of religious and moral education that paralleled earlier national visions of "republican motherhood."<sup>112</sup> *Die Deborah* exhorted the country's growing population of German-speaking Jewish American women to serve as the "connecting link in the chain of Judaism between America and Germany," and the paper offered news as well as "intellectual entertainment" for its readers.<sup>113</sup> It also featured regular articles about Cincinnati's growing theatrical offerings, including commentary and reviews of current productions, and sometimes poetry from or news about the prominent Jewish American actress Adah Isaacs Menken.<sup>114</sup> The inclusion of theatrical notes suggests that Jewish American women had become a regular part of the city's bourgeois theatre audience—perhaps particularly in the playhouse sponsored by Jewish American businessman Samuel Pike.

Jewish American women authors turned frequently to biblical figures as a source of inspiration for their fiction as well as their activism, a trend that also appeared in the playhouse, but often with a different intent. From these women's groups emerged a new vision of Jewish women's domestic feminism that would also make its way onto the popular stage and into American popular fiction and poetry. For example, in 1849, *The Occident* published a poem on "Women Heroines of the Bible," by Mrs. R. Hyneman. In the poem Hyneman reclaims the story of Moses's mother Jochebed, the same one Hannah More had appropriated as a Christian fable a few decades

before. In Hyneman's poem, Jochebed mourns, "My son, my pearl, my jewel without price / Oh how my yearning heart will bleed for thee / My lamb selected for the sacrifice / Ah whither shall thy sorrowing mother flee?"<sup>115</sup>

One of the most frequently invoked role models for Jewish American women became Esther, the queen who saved her people from the massacre plotted by the Persian king Ahasuerus's evil henchman, Haman. She was co-opted by male and female, as well as Jewish and Gentile, authors.<sup>116</sup> Plays such as *Origin of the Feast of Purim* and *A Sacred Drama on the Book of Esther* dramatized her story for adult and juvenile audiences alike.<sup>117</sup> Some early nineteenth-century renderings of the Esther story still framed it as a potential tool for conversion. For example, in the prologue to an 1829 drama published in Tioga County, New York, Mrs. Amira Carpenter Thompson hoped her playlet would remind "Ye favored Gentiles—ye who well have known / And felt the mercies of God's bleeding Son! / O give your alms, nor dare your aid withhold / To bring lost Israel to their Shepherd's fold."<sup>118</sup> Similarly, even while Royall Tyler's *Origin of the Feast of Purim* hailed Esther as a savior, it also contained a prophecy about the coming Messiah, thus shifting the underlying emphasis of this tale of Jewish female heroism to one of Christian piety.<sup>119</sup> Other Christian-inflected histories of Esther declared, "As a woman, Esther is a model . . . her mind was strong, heroic, sagacious, yet was she gentle, docile, modest."<sup>120</sup>

While some early Gentile American authors looked to Esther's story as a forerunner of Christian conversion and prime example of female modesty, Jewish playwrights linked Esther's story to the struggle for Jewish emancipation abroad. Those examples gradually made their way to the attention of American audiences. For example, Elizabeth Polack's 1835 drama *Esther, The Royal Jewess; or, The Death of Haman!* uses the Bible story to explore Jews' struggle for political emancipation.<sup>121</sup> Polack's Esther becomes less a model of womanly modesty and more a mouthpiece for religious tolerance. After the defeat of Haman's plot she declares, "Blessed be this hour! Happy be my king! And prosperous be the Jews of every land and clime! May the sacred tree of liberty never lose a branch in contending for religious superiority, but all be free to worship as he pleases! . . . Oh people of my own nation, may the heart-promised home you've sighed for present you golden hours of freedom, and down to posterity may the sons of Judah in every clime celebrate this time in happy Purim!" The stage directions in Polack's work call for a transparency to descend with the word "Purim" on it, and for Mordecai, Esther, and "numerous characters" to form a Grand Tableau



on the stage.<sup>122</sup> While I have not yet been able to identify a pre-Civil War production of Polack's play in the United States, there were postwar productions, and Polack's play *may* have circulated in America before the war, since it went through numerous editions and appeared as part of collections of popular British works distributed in the United States. Given the American public's apparent interest in stage Jewesses (as the endless variations of *Ivanhoe* attest), the failure of Polack's otherwise successful drama to find a home on the antebellum American stage seems suggestive. Her vision of Esther may have been too specifically intertwined with contemporary British political debates to resonate with American audiences. Or her apparent lack of interest in converting Esther may have doomed the drama in the eyes of managers who had marked the catastrophic failure of Thomas Wade's militantly pro-Jewish drama *The Jew of Arragon* only five years before (a play that, according to critics, not even the combined charms of the Kemble acting family could salvage). Or her politically independent Esther may not have aligned with contemporary American interpretations of the character or with popular Gentile American images of female Jewish identity. But even if American theatre audiences were not ready for aggressively political Jewish women onstage or off, there were some, such as Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*, Esther in Polack's *Royal Jewess*, or Confederate loyalists Adah Isaacs Menken and Eugenia Levy Phillips, who defied expectations to public perform their citizenship, despite risks to their reputation and their physical safety.

## PASSIONATE DOMESTICITY

I began this chapter by observing that the ways in which female Jewish identity could or should be performed remained something of an open question for American audiences in the late eighteenth century through the first half of the nineteenth century. While early American stage productions featuring Jewish female characters typically focused on the charm of the performer rather than on her "authentic Jewishness," by 1839 sensibilities had shifted to the point that *The Spirit of the Times* would hail passionate French star Rachel's revival of Racine's *Esther* as remarkable because it portrayed "the triumph of a Jewish queen . . . enacted by a Jewish actress."<sup>123</sup> In the final section of this chapter, I examine the ways Jewish Americans sought to claim ownership over the ways Jewish women were represented onstage, in the domestic sphere, and in popular culture.<sup>124</sup> In an 1838 letter to her niece, Miri-

am Cohen, Rebecca Gratz observed, "Your letter . . . my beloved Miriam, was our Purim treat last evening when the remnant of our circle were assembled to read the book of Esther and comment on the perfect unity of design by which Providence has worked out the deliverance of his people through several causes making his agents in the service of their own virtues & passions the contrivers of their destiny. I scarcely know any story . . . more . . . moral than that of Queen Esther. You know Mordecai is one of my favorite characters, and I think his firm & gentle cousin was worthy of his pupilage."<sup>125</sup> In addition to the kind of private Purim celebrations Gratz describes, which afforded women the opportunity to muse on the lessons of Esther's story in a domestic setting, ladies' benevolent societies hosted Purim Balls, which *The Occident* claimed were useful because they helped to "commemorate important events in our national history." The paper claimed that such celebrations were thus "elements of *popular education* [emphasis mine], in however slight a degree, which no moralist can safely disregard."<sup>126</sup> This "popular education" had both a domestic and feminized component. While stage versions of Esther's story and Purim Balls dwelt on the spectacle of elaborate historical costumes (or in Polack's more unusual case, her political influence), the pageantry of choruses singing her praise, etc., others imagined more homely applications of the holiday's lessons that straddled the realm of domestic feminism *and* the private setting of the home.<sup>127</sup> Rosalie Manahan's 1861 story "Our Purim Dinner, or What the Moonlight Saw in the Summer-House" offers a fascinating example of the way the story of Esther was reimagined as intimately connected both to Manahan's visibility as a Jewish American woman in the public sphere *and* her daily domestic experience as the mother of a Jewish American household. Manahan, a resident of Augusta, Georgia, had published a handful of stories in Isaac Leaser's paper. In a letter to Leaser from 1859, she says she hopes he will be able to offer her eight or ten dollars for her most recent story because, "I have promised them [the children] a good share of whatever I gain, for a feast on Purim, and a Purim tree. To which they are looking forward, with eager interest, and anticipations of enjoyment."<sup>128</sup> Manahan's writings link her own family's private celebrations of Purim with the festival's larger meaning for Jewish American women *and* with her identity as a Jewish American author, earning money for her family through her participation in the public sphere. In "Our Purim Dinner," Mahanan tells the story of two young Jewish American women who ask to plan their family's Purim celebrations: "Mamma had given us carte blanche for the nonce, and Papa a merry, 'Go ahead, girls, while you have the chance;

never mind the bills; Purim comes but once a year. . . . It opens the heart, makes us feel generous, impulsive, kindly disposed to one another, and full of pity for God's poor. Mind the doughnuts, the doughnuts, and the other things for the poor or else it will be no Purim."<sup>129</sup>

While Manahan's story begins by linking the holiday to the prosaic act of making doughnuts for the poor (thus implicitly uniting women's domestic duties and their philanthropic responsibilities beyond the home), it shifts in tone when the narrator recounts her emotions on hearing her father read aloud the story of Esther:

It has always been a favorite story of mine. . . . How beautifully, how heroically Esther, even on the throne, identifies her fate with that of her people. She will not share the throne with her people's destroyer. If the king dooms them to perish, she, a Jewess, will not throne it in splendor above the graves of her kindred, her friends, her people. . . . We rose from hearing my favorite story, full of noble resolves, heroic longings for inquisitions, or some terrible ordeal to prove our love and veneration of our faith.<sup>130</sup>

Her trials come soon enough, but not in the form she might have imagined. A terrible smell of burning comes from the kitchen and the girls rush in to see their Irish maid, Bridget, with her feet propped up on the stove, holding one of the family's ceremonial goblets full of beer in one hand, a plateful of Purim cakes in the other, and reading a penny dreadful.<sup>131</sup> In a passion of frustration, the girls fight with Bridget and spill the beer all over her. She resigns in anger. The girls are punished by their father by having to cook the dinner without any help from their mother or their domestic staff. They learn a valuable lesson in domestic humility as they perpetrate a series of culinary blunders, including using vinegar instead of wine and salt instead of sugar in preparing the meal.

Through this story, the tale of Esther becomes transformed into a parable for young Jewish American women on the necessity of learning the domestic skills required to supervise and celebrate the religious festival properly in their own homes. The story also gently satirizes the young girls' "heroic longings for inquisitions, or some terrible ordeal" to demonstrate their faith. Instead, it proffers domestic success as the model to which good Jewish girls should aspire. Given the status of the women's rights movement in the United States at the mid-point of the century, it hardly seems surpris-

ing that Manahan's more homespun version of Jewish female virtue proved more compelling than Polack's politically active heroine. Still it would be misleading to suggest that by the time Manahan's story was published in 1861, Esther had been universally embraced as the quintessential Jewish American domestic role model, supplanting other "exotic" Jewesses. The popular stereotypes of the stage persisted, but the question of *authenticity* grew more pointed as diverse models of Jewish American womanhood became increasingly visible through the charitable and artistic activities of Jewish women, such as those described above. Perhaps the most telling example is Kate Bateman's performance as Leah in Augustin Daly's perennially popular melodrama *Leah, the Forsaken*. In this play, adapted from Mosenthal's German *Deborah*, a Jewish maiden (Leah) falls in love with a Gentile named Rudolph. They cannot marry in their Austrian homeland, and so plot an elopement to America.<sup>132</sup> Through a series of deceptions by a jealous and renegade Jew formerly named Nathan but now known by the non-Jewish name of Carl, they become estranged. Rudolph marries his childhood sweetheart Madelena. Leah vows vengeance, cursing Rudolph and Madelena on their wedding day. Several years later she returns to seek her revenge, but is so moved by Rudolph's remorse that she lifts her curse. In the intervening years Rudolph has never forgotten Leah; he has named his daughter for her and has beseeched the emperor on behalf of the country's Jews. Rudolph and Madelena have even bidden their daughter Leah to pray for her long-lost namesake. While Leah forgives Rudolph at the end of the play, she poses no threat to his domestic happiness. She is ill and spent, and staggers offstage, bound for the "promised land."<sup>133</sup>

Stefanie Halpern has described Bateman's representation of Leah as "racially nondescript," suggesting that her success lay largely in her ethnic ambiguity and citing the *Manchester Guardian's* 1867 complaint: "What is there in her drawing of the character specifically Jewish? . . . Where has she introduced the grandeur, the poetry, the pathos which cling to the garments of the chosen people; where is there on her part any attempt to represent anything beyond the colourless figure of an outcast who might, for all the specialty she invests it, equally well represent a Mormon or Parsee?"<sup>134</sup> For this critic at least, Bateman's interpretation lacked a recognizable Jewish referent. Yet by contrast, just before the show's New York debut in 1863, the *Jewish Messenger* had pleaded, "The special attention of the Jewish residents of New York is solicited to the faithful manner in which the historical minutiae of this favorite work has been adhered to."<sup>135</sup> And the *New York Daily*

*Tribune* promised spectators "A company of artists expressly selected with a view to their fitness for the characters to be represented."<sup>136</sup> After the play's triumphant New York opening, the *Jewish Messenger* featured a long essay on the play in which the critic debated the authenticity of the stage Jews presented in *Leah* and *The Merchant of Venice*. The writer argues that "the effect of Shylock as represented in even the less offensive way . . . cannot but be bad upon a mixed [Jewish and Gentile] audience." He pleads, "For the sake of the sensibilities of the Jewish community, Shylock should forever be tabooed on our stage." He acknowledges that *Leah, the Forsaken* was encumbered with a great deal of "stupid" and "second rate" dialogue, as well as improbable plot points. Yet he contends that Bateman rendered her character with "rare fidelity" and that the character of Leah should supersede Shylock on the stage so that "the minds of the masses [would] be disabused of the unfounded prejudice they have formed against the Hebrew race" and so that the "Jewish question" might be settled for once and for all.<sup>137</sup>

One wonders what this critic would have made of the character Rifka in Herman M. Moos's 1860 melodrama *Mortara, or the Pope's Inquisitors*. While not a central character in the story, Rifka—the sister of a peddler and servant to Mortara (though she calls him "Father")—represents the rising hope of a new generation of Jewish women. Rifka witnesses the death of Mortara's wife, Yulah, after losing her son Benjamin to papal authorities. She stands by Mortara in his trials and witnesses his despair on a windswept heath as Mortara curses those who have failed to aid his cause. Ultimately, Mortara recognizes that Rifka has no future in Italy, where Jews remain victims of religious oppression. He gives her his gold chain and bids her "flee . . . to Columbia's shore," prophesying that in America she will find freedom and protection. Daly's Leah will never find "the promised land" except in death: while the other Jews in *Leah, the Forsaken* may travel to America, the title character is too spent by the bitterness of her struggle and might contaminate the young country with her legacy of madness and curses. Rifka, on the other hand, leaves the madness of European oppression and, with Mortara's blessing, seeks a happier life in a new land.<sup>138</sup> While Moos may not have been writing expressly to create a new fantasy of Jewish American womanhood, his praise of Isaac Wise in the play and the fact that the drama was published by the offices of *The Israelite* suggests that Moos was influenced by the activism of those Jewish men and women working alongside him in Cincinnati.<sup>139</sup>

The quest for an authentically passionate, domestic, and romantic Jew-

ess would continue to haunt American audiences, and indeed it seems an impossibly tall order that one character should embody all these traits. As I suggested at the beginning of the chapter, the character's journey was not a linear one from submission to emancipation, from exotic other to free citizen. Yet, when closely examined, the influence of Jewish American women on perceptions of pre-Civil War Jewish female characters onstage and in popular fiction appears undeniable, whether in Rachel Mordecai's confrontation with Maria Edgeworth, Rebecca Gratz's anecdotal inspiration of Sir Walter Scott, or Moise, Hyneman, and Manahan's recuperation of biblical heroines.

As a coda to this list of heroines and early Jewish American female stars, I point to the rise of star actresses such as Rose Eytinge, known as the "black-eyed Jewess." Eytinge took to the stage in 1852, and while her greatest successes would come after the Civil War, she merits mention because she would go on to challenge audience perceptions of Jewish American womanhood in a career that spanned until 1907. Passionate onstage, witty and charming offstage, Eytinge captivated spectators, including President Abraham Lincoln, who commented jocularly upon meeting her, "So this is the little lady that all us folks in Washington like so much?"<sup>140</sup> Perhaps no other moment marks so well the Jewish American woman's journey into a *safe* visibility than Eytinge's friendly reception in that quintessentially domestic yet public sphere: the White House.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *“If I Forget Thee”*

#### Performing Jewish Rituals on the Antebellum Stage

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither, let my tongue cleave to my palate if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.<sup>1</sup>

Every new comer introduced something new, either from his own conceit or fancy, or . . . from the Congregation where he was bred, or the one he last came from.

—MANUEL JOSEPHSON TO MOSES SEIXAS, FEBRUARY 4, 1790<sup>2</sup>

The parnas of Mikveh Israel Synagogue in Philadelphia, Manuel Josephson had every reason to complain about new customs being introduced into familiar synagogue rituals when he wrote to his friend Moses Seixas in 1790. In the year following George Washington’s election, numerous communities and congregations around the nation—both Gentile and Jewish—sent Washington their congratulations. Initially, Jewish communities in Charleston, Savannah, New York, Newport, Richmond, and Philadelphia had planned to send a joint letter to Washington. Unfortunately, infighting among the groups, including schisms among the Sephardic and Ashkenazic groups in each city, produced a substantial delay, and in the end Washington received *three* letters from various Jewish leaders, including Josephson.<sup>3</sup> The incident of the multiple letters might strike the modern historian as almost comical, but it speaks to dilemmas many Jewish Americans faced as they struggled to integrate their religious traditions into pre-Civil War American society and to establish religious communities among groups of immigrants, each of whom brought different customs to the new country.<sup>4</sup> Diaries, letters, and newspaper articles record Jewish Americans’ concerns about sustaining the integrity of their traditions. They also reveal Gentiles’



fascination with Jewish ritual, whether in accounts of Jewish weddings, stories of encounters in synagogues, or anecdotes about seeing Jews prepare kosher food and wine. For many Gentiles, Jewish culture appeared intensely mysterious, sometimes embellished with hidden and potentially dangerous rites; thus stage interpretations of Jewish religious performances—such as Purim, Passover, or the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot)—crafted by Gentile authors were often highly exoticized, with representations ranging from reverential to raucous. Nevertheless, they offered opportunities for Jews and non-Jews alike to contemplate the significance of Jewish rituals in an American cultural context. The issues that played out onstage sometimes echoed offstage dramas as well, such as those that concerned intermarriage and conversion. At other times, false rumors about Jewish blood libel colored perceptions about stage Jewish characters.<sup>5</sup> Calls for reforming the faith rent Jewish American communities at various points throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, and these debates were thrashed out among Jewish American dramatists as well. For example, playwright Isaac Harby protested vehemently against outdated practices. Samuel B. H. Judah's later dramas called angrily for reform, while Herman Moos used his play *Mortara* to declare his allegiance to renowned reformer Isaac Mayer Wise.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter explores a range of plays and productions that represented Jewish rituals and biblical history to American readers and theatregoers, including Royall Tyler's *The Origin of the Feast of Purim* (1822–25), Thomas Wade's *The Jew of Arragon; or, The Hebrew Queen* (1830), W. T. Montcrieff's *The Jewess; or, The Council of Constance* (1835),<sup>7</sup> Henry Ware Jr.'s *The Feast of Tabernacles* (1837), and Samuel B. H. Judah's *David and Uriah* (1835) and *The Maid of Midian* (1835).<sup>8</sup> Each of these plays—some American-authored and some imported from Britain—intersected with current debates about constructions and interpretations of American Judaism. Experiences and information circulating outside the playhouse shaped audiences' reception of what they saw onstage, particularly the various movements to convert Jews to Christianity that escalated alongside the religious fervor of the Second Great Awakening that reached its zenith between the 1820s and 1840s. While some playwrights, such as Thomas Wade, depicted Jewish rituals onstage to celebrate the faith or to illuminate its mysteries for non-Jewish spectators, others, such as Royall Tyler, imagined that instances of Jewish salvation (like Purim), foretold Jews' eventual redemption through Christ.

Before launching into a discussion of stage representations of Jewish religious rituals, however, I examine another series of performances involving

Jewish Americans that played out across the colonial and post-Revolutionary landscape: rituals of tolerance. These included the formal exchange of letters between Washington and Jewish synagogue leaders, or parades in which Jewish religious leaders marched arm-in-arm with Christian ministers, or donations by Jews or Gentiles to each other's causes (particularly in the wake of the Richmond Theatre fire). Each of these rituals was consciously performed as a public celebration of the nation's commitment to religious freedom.

#### "A DEAD WALL BETWEEN CHURCH AND SYNAGOGUE"

A long history of religious intolerance in Europe produced the most familiar Jewish "religious" figures early American audiences encountered in the playhouse: *conversos*, sometimes known as *marannos*, and *renegados*. The terms *converso* and *maranno* refer to Jews, generally of Spanish or Portuguese descent, who had been forcibly converted to Christianity (primarily in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) but who were suspected of still secretly practicing the Jewish faith. These Jews faced constant scrutiny from Church authorities, and community members caught practicing Jewish rituals or even *suspected* of practicing were subjected to brutal torture or execution. Threats of punishment and a wish to find a land where they might openly profess their faith drove many *marannos* out of Spain and Portugal toward Protestant Europe or settlements in the New World.<sup>9</sup> *Conversos* and *marannos* often entered the British dramatic lexicon as figures that demonstrated the intolerance of other nations (such as Spain), or as characters that underscored political points during Britain's debates over Jewish enfranchisement in the mid-eighteenth century. By the early nineteenth century, they had become sacrificial figures (as in *The Jewess; or, The Council of Constance*).

The other recurring character was the *renegado*. The term refers to a character who had willingly abandoned his faith, such as Ben Hassan in *Slaves in Algiers* or Nathan (alias Carl the Schoolmaster) in *Leah, the Forsaken*.<sup>10</sup> The *converso* often inspired pity—perhaps mingled with some wariness—as in *The Jewess; or The Council of Constance*. The *renegado* generally provoked contempt and suspicion. One of the earliest *renegados* on the American stage was a Portuguese Jew named Isaac Mendoza from Richard Brinsley Sheridan's popular 1775 comedy *The Duenna*. Mendoza's treatment throughout the play hints at the intolerance Jews experienced during the eighteenth century, even after they ostensibly converted to Christianity.

In Sheridan's play Mendoza renounces his citizenship and his faith to marry (he believes) a Spanish beauty named Louisa. Instead, he finds himself tricked into marrying her elderly duenna. In act 1, three characters—Don Jerome, Ferdinand, and Louisa (Mendoza's intended fiancée)—debate Mendoza's suitability as a husband. Their exchange offers some insights into how Gentile spectators might have viewed Jews' efforts to assimilate into non-Jewish culture through conversion. For Ferdinand and Louisa, Mendoza's conversion is meaningless; he is effectively a *renegado* who converts for material gain rather than out of personal conviction.

DON JEROME: Isaac Mendoza will be here presently, and to-morrow you shall marry him.

LOUISA: Never while I have life.

FERDINAND: Indeed, Sir, I wonder how you can think of such a man for a son-in-law.

JEROME: Sir, you are very kind to favour me with your sentiments—and pray, what is your objection to him?

FERDINAND: He is a Portugeze [*sic*] in the first place.

JEROME: No such thing, boy, he has forsworn his country.

LOUISA: He is a Jew.

JEROME: Another mistake: he has been a Christian these six weeks.

FERDINAND: Ay, he left his old religion for an estate, and has not had time to get a new one.

LOUISA: But stands like a dead wall between church and synagogue, or like the blank leaves between the Old and New Testament.<sup>11</sup>

Louisa's description of Mendoza as a "dead wall between church and synagogue, or like blank leaves between the Old and New Testament," captures the liminal status both British and American Jews often experienced at the end of the eighteenth century, and it points to prejudices many Jews continued to encounter in Britain throughout much of the eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

Yet unlike their coreligionists who remained in Britain, colonial American Jews had opportunities to fill those "blank leaves" with new text signaling the end of the need to deny their faith, although even those opportunities were often fraught with conflict. In 1740 the British government had passed an act allowing naturalization of Jews who were "settled or shall settle in any of his Majesty's Colonies in America."<sup>13</sup> The act included a special provision for rewording the naturalization oath to allow Jews to take it

*without* renouncing their faith: "Whenever any Person professing the Jewish Religion shall present himself to take the said Oath [ . . . ] the said Words (upon the true Faith of a Christian) shall be omitted out of the said Oath."<sup>14</sup> This alteration in the oath-taking process and change to the standard ritual (the swearing of allegiance) reflects a shift in the community it serves as well as the intended *effect* of the ritual. While the British law may have been motivated by a practical need to encourage overseas settlement, it had created a new point of entry for Jewish citizens to participate in the colonial polity. By adjusting the wording of the naturalization oath, Britain created a new ritual performance signifying religious tolerance in colonial culture.

The story of Jewish merchant Aaron Lopez underscores how ritual performances of tolerance shaped Jewish Americans' engagement with Gentile culture. Lopez had been a *converso* in Portugal who had seen family members tortured by the Inquisition before he fled to the colonies. He initially sought citizenship in his adopted city of Newport (where he was reportedly the state's wealthiest citizen) but was rejected on the grounds that a colonial law from 1633 stipulated that only Christians could become citizens of Rhode Island, even though Britain's 1740 Naturalization Act featured no such requirement. Tellingly, Rhode Island elected to preserve the link between citizenship and Christianity abrogated by the British amendment of 1740. In emphasizing links between faith and citizenship they performed an act of *intolerance* that technically violated British law. After Rhode Island's court refused to grant him citizenship, Lopez moved to Massachusetts. There this wealthy, influential, and philanthropically inclined man finally received acknowledgment of his citizenship after more than twenty years' residency in America. His oath of naturalization (taken in 1762) shows the phrase "upon the true faith of a Christian" crossed out on the printed form (as it must have been omitted verbally during the oath taking). With one pen stroke, Lopez had taken the "blank leaves" of that space between Jew and Christian and inscribed a new Jewish American identity upon it. He participated in a ritual enactment of national allegiance, but with an altered script.

Lopez's story offers a real-life counternarrative to that of *The Duenna's* comical Isaac Mendoza. Lopez successfully shook off the taint of the *converso* and used the privileges of the New World to reclaim his Jewish identity while establishing his British-American citizenship.<sup>15</sup> Sheridan's Mendoza renounces his faith and citizenship for a fortune, only to suffer the fate of so many stage *conversos* or *renegados*: failing to persuade Gentile observers of the genuineness of his conversion. In Mendoza's case, the ritual of baptism

has been insufficient to erase the problem of his origins. Ultimately, as with characters discussed in previous chapters, Mendoza's comic value comes from his inability to pass successfully into Gentile culture.

Sheridan's comedy quickly became a staple of the early national stage, appearing in its full form and as a shortened afterpiece titled *The Elopement*. The play made its first appearance before American audiences under the auspices of Dennis Ryan's company in 1783, and it remained in the repertoire well into the mid-nineteenth century. The role of Mendoza proved a popular and lucrative one for American actors. Beginning in 1783, the play appeared throughout the early American circuit (including performances in Jamaica, Charleston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston).<sup>16</sup> Mr. Bates played Mendoza at his benefit in Philadelphia in 1794. Thomas Wignell played the part in Jamaica, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, and Mr. Godwin (of Jamaica) and Mr. Bignall both played it for benefit nights in Charleston and Philadelphia.<sup>17</sup> It seems particularly telling that Wignell, an early American star, should have taken the role of Mendoza, since he was well known for his broad comic characters.<sup>18</sup> Casting Wignell suggests that Mendoza struck audiences as a clownish but ultimately unthreatening and unsophisticated figure.

Like Isaac Mendoza, the *renegado* character of Ben Hassan in Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers* (1794) appears as a character that no ritual transformation can alter, even though he forswears his faith and "puts on the turban" of a Muslim.<sup>19</sup> Hassan's character emerged on the Philadelphia stage in the wake of a political debate over Pennsylvania's Test Acts (loyalty oaths sworn on a Christian Bible). As noted in chapter 1, these acts were implemented during the war (1777) and after the Revolution, many citizens, including Quakers and Jews in Pennsylvania, complained that these acts violated previous naturalization laws as well as religious freedom. Indeed, debates over the acts continued into the early 1790s. While the action of *Slaves in Algiers* takes place far from Philadelphia, Ben Hassan's treachery to the republican characters in the play invites audiences to speculate on whether a Jew could be loyal to any cause. Hassan is referred to as a "traitor" in the play, in addition to being described in the character list as a *renegado*.<sup>20</sup> Hassan is the first *renegado* written for an American audience rather than a British one. His sin lies not only in renouncing his faith for personal gain, but in failing to embrace the spirit of *pro bono publico* that animates the other characters in the play and that became an underlying theme of republican ideology.<sup>21</sup> Like Mendoza, his oath takings, in this case to forswear Judaism for Islam or

to help the escaping lovers in the drama, prove empty rites unable to change his fundamentally corrupt nature.

# "A SINGULAR MODE OF WORSHIP"

The early national era brought a time of testing and experimentation on-stage and off as citizens pushed the boundaries of the religious tolerance promised by the young country's founding documents. As Jonathan Sarna notes, some Jews connected the redemptive message of the Constitution to "the language of messianism, thereby linking America's divinely ordained fate to that of the Jews."<sup>22</sup>

That redemptive message played out in a series of public demonstrations of interfaith cooperation and interfaith "curiosity" following the Revolution. Jews and Gentiles collaborated on various charitable and patriotic projects, imagining these instances of shared effort as evidence of the nation's commitment to religious freedom. There were also moments of investigation or exchange, when community members ventured into each other's worlds, whether it was Jews attending a Christian sermon or Gentiles participating in a seder. While interfaith exchanges were neither new nor unique to America, the observations of the American participants are often framed in the rhetoric of republican tolerance, as though witnesses were not only intrigued by what they were observing but proud of their own open-mindedness in daring to be there.

One example of Jewish and Gentile charitable collaboration appeared in 1788, when the "Hebrews of Philadelphia" circulated a petition seeking funds to help them save their synagogue, which had fallen into disrepair during the war.<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Franklin, David Rittenhouse, and several other prominent Gentile Philadelphians donated generously to the cause. Their support helped preserve a concrete symbol of the Jewish faith ensconced in the Philadelphia landscape. On July 4 of that same year, Jews and Gentiles appeared together in public performances of interfaith solidarity when the city's rabbi marched arm-in-arm with two Gentile religious leaders as part of a local Independence Day parade. Benjamin Rush described the event in glowing terms: "There could not have been a more happy emblem contrived, of that section of the new constitution, which opens all power and offices alike, not only to every sect of christians [*sic*] but to worthy men of *every* religion [*emphasis original*]."<sup>24</sup> For Rush, the public performance

of religious tolerance superseded individual practices of any faith. As his account suggests, a figurative worship of the Constitution had the power to unite all Americans, despite their religious diversity.<sup>25</sup> It is important to note, however, that after the parade, the Jewish participants dined at a separate kosher table. Jonathan Sarna argues that “this public expression of Jewish ritual behavior . . . effectively defined the boundaries of the interreligious relations from the synagogue community’s official perspective.”<sup>26</sup> By electing to separate themselves from Gentile participants during the feast, Sarna suggests that “they [the Jewish leaders] exercised their right to eat apart, following the precepts of their faith, formulated to help preserve Jews as a group.”<sup>27</sup> Not only did Jewish participants invoke their right to practice their faith openly, they displayed, before multitudes who had perhaps never had occasion to see them, specific foods and traditional prayers that accompanied Jewish domestic rituals. How would Gentile spectators at the 1788 Fourth of July celebration have responded? Would they have wondered at the *birkat hamazon*, the Jewish tradition of prayers given *after* rather than before meals (particularly those meals that included bread)?<sup>28</sup> Would they have understood the *zimmin*, a ritual invitation to say grace, extended to other Jews assembled in the gathering?<sup>29</sup> And perhaps failing to recognize or understand rituals they might have been witnessing for the first time, how might they have assimilated that information into their understanding of what constituted “Jewishness” in American culture?

While it is not possible to address these questions at length in the scope of this chapter, the diary of Mrs. Smith of Newburyport, Massachusetts, offers insights into how at least one Gentile woman integrated her observations of Jewish rituals into her larger understanding of religious performance and religious tolerance in American society. Smith’s diaries record her travels from Massachusetts to Georgia and back again throughout several months during 1793. Her entries suggest that some Gentile observers equated attending Jewish rituals with theatrical or other types of performative events. For example, in Savannah Mrs. Smith met the Sheftalls (one of the city’s most established Jewish families) and attended the city’s synagogue, which she described as exhibiting “a singular mode of worship.” After the service she noted that she “went to Mr. Sheftall’s to eat some Passover cake” (possibly a cake made with matzo meal, suggesting that she was visiting during Passover holidays and participated in a seder at the Sheftall’s house).<sup>30</sup> Smith’s diary records further social visits with the Sheftalls, as well as her repeated attendance at local African American religious services before she



left for Charleston. There she recorded seeing a production of *The School for Scandal* at the Charleston playhouse and viewing a Catholic baptism at a local church. Subsequent travels took her from Charleston to Norfolk to Wilmington.<sup>31</sup> In Wilmington she recorded dining with a group of Quakers. At her next stop in Philadelphia she saw the equestrian circus, Peale's Museum, and a performance at the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. She also heard a sermon by the renowned Bishop White as well as services at the local Catholic Church and the "Dutch Chapel." Before finally making her way home to Newburyport (via Providence and Boston), she also visited St. Paul's Church and Trinity Church in New York.<sup>32</sup>

Smith's diary reads as half travelogue, half ethnographic study. In each city she visited, she became a "participant-observer" in a diverse array of religious celebrations, black and white, Christian and non-Christian. She viewed each with the same interest that she brought to the performances at the Charleston and Philadelphia playhouses, the circus, or the sensations in Peale's Museum. Moreover, Smith's diary (unintentionally) chronicles the impressive religious diversity of the new nation in 1793, as well as a level of openness and tolerance surpassing that of the Old World. Indeed, despite the "casual anti-Semitism" that still plagued Jewish Americans, there was a strain of postwar discourse—such as George Washington's famous letter to the Jews of Newport in 1790—that promised that Jewish Americans would be *rewarded* for their loyalty to the new nation. As Washington wrote, "It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection, should demean themselves as good citizens." He added, "May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid."<sup>33</sup>

Even as Franklin, Rittenhouse, Rush, Smith, and Washington celebrated performances of religious freedom, many Jewish Americans continued to find obstacles in their paths to full citizenship. Some states, including New York and Virginia, had passed laws banning religious discrimination during and after the war. And by 1791, the Bill of Rights "outlawed religious tests 'as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.'"<sup>34</sup> Despite these new laws, however, many statewide prohibitions remained,

and as Sarna notes, Jews were often not the intended beneficiaries of laws guaranteeing religious freedom. They may have benefited by default, but more frequently special provisions had to be made to accommodate them (such as the Maryland Jew Bill of 1826 discussed in chapter 1). And, as I have suggested, tensions between local or national performances of acceptance would generate intense frustration among Jewish Americans who found themselves stranded in a realm between citizen and outsider, “between church and synagogue.”

### “THEIR DUST WILL MINGLE IN ONE COMMON TOMB”

Despite the continuing legal challenges such as those mentioned above, many Jewish citizens were eager to celebrate the *comparative* religious liberties they enjoyed in post-Revolutionary America. They participated eagerly in their local communities, supporting charitable and artistic endeavors with enthusiasm. Such was the case for Jewish immigrant Joseph Darmstadt, a Hessian soldier who was captured during the Revolution and who, on December 6, 1784, swore an oath of allegiance to America. After the war he settled in Richmond, Virginia. There he established a successful coffee house and, among other ventures, invested in the city’s first postwar theatre.<sup>35</sup> Darmstadt was also a staunch supporter of Richmond’s Jewish community. On March 13, 1789, he penned a poem about an upcoming Purim celebration at the home of his friend Jacob Cohen. In it he compares Cohen and his wife to the couple at the center of the Purim tale, Ahasuerus and Esther.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps more tellingly, Darmstadt reminisces, “As I was in companie not very late / wen we all Joint in one Debate / There was [*illegible*] & Quakers / Sadlers Leaf Pikers and Candel Makers / It was wen we was all in union / and we was all joint in one opinion [*sic*].”<sup>37</sup> Darmstadt’s poem is hardly noteworthy for the quality of its verse (as the sample above certainly attests), nor does it provide any startling revelations about its author’s faith. What it *does* offer is a window into a remarkably companionable community, one in which men from all faiths and walks of life (Quakers and candle makers) might join in “one opinion” and in which Jews might openly celebrate their religious festivals without fear of persecution.

Richmond was home to approximately one hundred Jewish Americans after the war. Darmstadt was one of the city’s most recognizable residents and had even been invited to join the elite “Richmond Amicable Associa-

tion." As Herbert Ezekiel and Gaston Lichtenstein observe, "No better evidence of his standing in the community . . . could be given."<sup>38</sup> Richmond folk appreciated Darmstadt's gregarious personality and his engagement with the local community. He was a lifelong Mason.<sup>39</sup> He also helped to found the city's postwar synagogue, Beth-Shalome (1791).<sup>40</sup> Like Jasper, the naturalized American father figure in Mordecai Noah's *She Would Be a Soldier*, Darmstadt adopted a land that promised him opportunities for financial and spiritual independence. And as an investor in the Richmond Theatre, along with fellow citizen Samuel Mordecai (of the well-known Mordecai family discussed in chapters 3 and 5), Darmstadt was as highly visible in his city's cultural rituals as he was in its religious life.<sup>41</sup>

Darmstadt's success story exemplifies the trajectory so many Jewish Americans envisioned for themselves in the postwar years, but I am more intrigued by the ways in which his faith (and that of his fellow Jews in Richmond) would be tested in the horrific fire of December 26, 1811, that destroyed the theatre he had helped to found. A disastrous blaze that killed seventy-two spectators, including the governor of Virginia, the Richmond Theatre fire marked a watershed in American theatre history. The attempts of Richmond's citizens to deal with the tragedy provide a valuable window into how Jewish religious practices could exist alongside, and even complement, those of other religious traditions.

In a letter to his sister Rachel, Samuel Mordecai offered a detailed description of the horrors he experienced on the night of the fire:

The events of last night were the most horrid I ever witnessed—Sol and myself had gone to Oakland on Christmas and returned last evening too much fatigued fortunately to go to the Theatre. About 11 o'clock we were roused by the fire bell and found the theatre in a blaze. The scene that there presented itself baffles all powers of description.

The air was rent with the cries of fathers and mothers calling for their children, children for their parents, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, each seeking for those most dear to them. A very crowded audience had attended and during the pantomime a scene suspended in the roof took fire and immediately communicated to others and to the building generally such a suffocating smoke was immediately produced that many persons were probably rendered incapable of exertion before they could reach the doors. Numbers were trampled to death. Many leapt from the windows and escaped with life, sometimes with fractured limbs.

Of our immediate connections, none are injured. Uncle Sam[ue]l with his sons Sam and Gustavus were there but escaped unhurt. Little Jos Myers leaped out of a window, while his clothes were scorching and received but a little injury—but I dread to enumerate to you those who were lost in the general calamity. It is supposed upwards of fifty souls perished. I would forbear the enumeration of any of them did I not fear that exaggeration might even make horror more horrible. Among those who have not been found are Mr. Smith, the Governor, Mr. Venable, Mrs. Heron, Margaret Copland, Mrs. Gallys, and Miss Conyers (old), Mrs. Page, Mrs. Gibson—one of the Miss Craigs, Miss Whitlock, James Gibbon, Mr. and Mrs. Botts, four young ladies from Mr. Anderson's school, Mrs. Patterson, besides many, many others whose names you will soon find detailed in the papers. You may imagine the scene the city presents—for almost every family has to lament the loss or injury of some member or friend of it, and the wounded are distributed about in houses to which they were accidentally carried. . . . May God bless you all and avert you from every mischance."<sup>42</sup>

In *The Hebrews in America*, Isaac Markens writes that the fire "brought grief to numerous Hebrew households." Among the known dead in the Jewish community were "Mrs. Zipporah Marks, Miss Eliza Jacobs, Joseph Jacobs, Charlotte Raphiel and Adelaide Boseman."<sup>43</sup> A few days after the fire, Solomon Mordecai wrote to Samuel Mordecai that he had been called upon to spread the news to Jews beyond Richmond who had lost friends or loved ones in the fire: "To my lot it fell to inform them of the dreadful calamity and almost to renew the scene of woe from which I had just fled." He added that he had heard a report in Petersburg that the site would be made into a church and that "the remains will be deposited near the spot from which they were taken."<sup>44</sup> Most of the dead would ultimately be buried in a mass grave in what had been the orchestra pit, and the plan was to construct a monument over the remains.

While Jews and Gentiles alike fasted and prayed in the wake of the disaster, for members of the Jewish community, the fire brought not only the anguish of losing close friends and family members, but the painful question of whether it was possible to give a Jewish burial to those whose remains were mingled with those of Christian spectators.<sup>45</sup> Even the smallest Jewish communities in the colonies had established their own separate cemeteries whenever they could, and records of them survive on numerous eighteenth-

century maps.<sup>46</sup> Richmond had established its first Jewish cemetery in 1789, only twenty-two years before the fire.

The devastation of the fire, however, made identification of most victims virtually impossible, leaving community members little choice but to accept the theatre site as the final burial place of lost relatives and friends. In an ordinance issued on December 28, the city resolved that "the site of the Theatre should be consecrated as the sacred deposit of their bones and ashes."<sup>47</sup> And while some may have regretted that they were unable to bury according to religious custom, most of the city's residents found themselves united by their common grief. Indeed, some families let their loved ones be buried in the mass grave even after their remains were successfully identified. As one sorrowful father wrote to a friend, "I have no wish to separate the remains of my beloved child from those of the amiable and dear companions, in whose embrace, perhaps, she died. Side by side they sunk, together their immortal spirits took flight, and it is even a sort of melancholy satisfaction that their dust will mingle in one common tomb, social even in death."<sup>48</sup>

Leroy Anderson, the author of the letter, found comfort in picturing his daughter surrounded by friends at the moment of her death, and others in the community also imagined that the site could become a memorial to unite the city. Richmond's mayor tasked a group of Jewish and Gentile residents with gathering information about the dead who would be buried at the site.<sup>49</sup> On December 31, 1811, the *Richmond Enquirer* reported a funeral procession that marched through the city's streets, bringing together clergy alongside "Ladies in Carriages, the Executive Council, Directors of the Bank, Members of the Legislature . . . [and] Citizens on foot and horseback."<sup>50</sup> Jews and Gentiles took to the streets together to bury their dead and then gathered among members of their respective communities for further comfort; according to the *Eastern Argus*, after the funeral procession, "Every place of public worship was opened."<sup>51</sup>

Roughly two weeks after the calamity, Jewish and Gentile citizens joined again to establish a committee to erect a monument on the site.<sup>52</sup> But they soon found that purchasing the land and constructing a monument cost more than they had anticipated. At the same time, the city's Episcopal Church was foundering in its efforts to raise funds for a new building. The two groups came together to form an "Association for Building a Church on Shockoe Hill." In a proposal to the city, they pledged to "unite all sums of money which were intended to be applied to the erection of the monument with the funds of the . . . Association, which aggregate sum shall be

applied to the purpose of purchasing the whole lot of ground whereon the Theatre lately stood, and erecting thereon a monumental church."<sup>53</sup> In a further altruistic gesture, some of the city's Jewish citizens paid for pews in what would be known as the Monumental Church.<sup>54</sup> Thus the city's theatre, which began as a site of Jewish and Gentile collaboration and celebration, ended in ceremonies that marked another, and perhaps more symbolic, ritual of Jewish and Christian union.

"ALL REPORTS OF THIS KIND  
ARE ABOMINABLE FALSITIES"

But while the events described above—the parades, the theatre-going, socializing, and even the common funeral rites—suggest a nation making its way toward a greater acceptance of Jewish Americans, Jewish citizens individually and collectively continued to feel the invidious pressure to shed their Jewish identity in order to become more fully "American." Only one year before the Richmond Theatre fire prompted the coming together of the city's Jewish and Gentile residents, the Mordecais of Richmond had experienced a disturbing episode. On October 3, 1810, Samuel Mordecai wrote to his sisters Ellen and Rachel concerning an outlandish rumor he had heard about his family, namely that that his father had converted to Christianity:

Had you not apprised me that such a report was circulated I know not how this declaration would have affected me. As it was, it excited no very pleasant sensations and I was strongly disposed to contradict him [Mr. Ruffin] very flatly, and should have done so had there not been a third person present. But I contented myself with expressing doubts, etc. To oppose which he assured me he received it from my father's lips, who further told he had communicated it to his family!!! All this is very ridiculous, but very disagreeable. Such matters are too serious for jest and may prove very injurious. . . . I hope the report will not obtain circulation here, for I know nothing that would give me more pain.<sup>55</sup>

On November 29, 1810, Jacob Mordecai replied to Samuel:

I am not much surprised at the report you say has circulated in relation to my conversion to Christianity [*sic*], much industry has been used by

the conflicting sects of Methodists & Baptists in framing stories of my having become an apostate. Those reports wherever they originated circulated at a distance from me. Within the circle of my acquaintance or in the Society there, nothing is heard of that [illegible]. My conduct, my sentiments, & my whole deportment bear too strong in evidence to the contrary for the most zealous in the cause of their religion to credit for a moment. . . . I have to request that you will assure those who have any interest in my concerns that all reports of this kind are abominable falsities, that no part of my conduct or that of any branch of my family has authorized these reports, that all who know us, all who live in the town or its neighborhood, know them to be unfounded.<sup>56</sup>

The family's outrage at Jacob Mordecai being labeled an "apostate" or *renegado* emerges clearly in these letters, as does their concern that members of their community might believe themselves betrayed. Earlier that fall, Samuel had expressed his annoyance at a series of religious revival meetings taking place in Richmond, observing that "The association of Baptists is assembled here and the place is filled with the Godly multitude—consisting of White and Black and all the intermediate shades, Male and Female—of all ages from the 'infant mewling and puking in its nurse's arms' up to the 'lean and slippered pantaloons.'<sup>57</sup> I almost pity the poor Devil he has such a lot of enemies. . . . The work of righteousness will be concluded tomorrow, when the Devil will be left to resume his labours unmolested."<sup>58</sup> Samuel's jaded suggestion that Richmond residents would fall back into their old habits once the revivalists left town does not disguise his rueful understanding that no matter how firmly he and his family might feel themselves established in their businesses and homes, there were still many who imagined them as wandering sheep to be brought back into the fold.<sup>59</sup>

The 1820s and 1830s brought a substantial number of Jewish immigrants to American shores, as the total number of Jews in the country climbed from roughly three thousand to more than fifteen thousand. American Jewish populations began negotiating complicated amalgamations of Sephardic and Ashkenazic traditions within their communities. Some congregations introduced organ music (a Portuguese or "Reform" innovation). Jewish prayer books began to be printed in America. Cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston added more and more synagogues to meet the demands of their growing populations. Efforts to convert Jewish Americans also escalated in the 1820s and 1830s as part of the Second Great Awaken-



ing. Novels, newspaper articles, and even children's chapbooks told tales of deathbed conversions. The trope of the "dying Jewess" became particularly popular and generally featured the loyal Jewish daughter begging her father to embrace Christianity so that they might meet in heaven. The children's story *The Dying Jewess* offers a classic example. Set in western Virginia, it recounts the tale of a Jewish father who had educated his daughter "in the principles of that religion [and] . . . thought he had presented it with an ornament." Yet the daughter sickened and died, and on her deathbed she begged a last boon from her father:

"I know, my dear father, you have ever loved me—you have been the kindest of parents, and I tenderly love you. Will you grant me one request?—O, my father, it is the dying request of your daughter—will you grant it?"

"My dearest child, ask what you will, though it take every cent of my property, whatever it may be, it shall be granted. I will grant it."

"My dear father, I beg you never again to speak against JESUS OF NAZARETH!" The father was dumb with astonishment. "I know," continued the dying girl, "I know but little about this Jesus, for I was never taught. But I know that he is a Saviour, for he has manifested himself to me since I have been sick, even for the salvation of my soul. I believe he will save me. I feel that I am going to him—that I shall ever be with him. And now, my dear father, do not deny me. . . . I entreat you to obtain a Testament that tells of him, and when I am no more, you may bestow on him that love which was formerly mine!"<sup>60</sup>

While *The Dying Jewess* offers a dramatic example of the ways in which some Gentiles imagined Jews might be brought to salvation, others, including playwright Royall Tyler, conjured visions in which Jews' own rituals might lead them toward conversion, or at least toward envisioning a Christian future. Between 1822 and 1825, Tyler, celebrated author of *The Contrast* (1787), wrote a play about Purim entitled *The Origin of the Feast of Purim*.<sup>61</sup> As suggested in chapter 5, the character of Esther inspired admiration among both Jews and Gentiles, so it is perhaps not surprising that Tyler, like other artists, turned to Esther's tale for dramatic material. For example, in 1822 several newspapers in New York and Baltimore reported on an exhibit of paintings, including a "life size" depiction of Esther's accusation of Haman.<sup>62</sup> These colorful costumes apparently adorned the stage as well, as

frontispieces for plays such as *Esther, the Royal Jewess*; or, *The Death of Haman!* indicate.<sup>63</sup> In that image, for example, Esther appears turbaned and gowned in "Eastern" draperies.

This same dramatic scene offers the climactic moment in Tyler's rendition of the story as well. As she pleads with the king, Esther cries, "And if it pleases the King, O let my life / Be given unto me at my petition, / And the life of my own people granted / Me at my request, for both I and they / Are sold to be destroy'd—and to be slain / And utterly to perish." The king exclaims, "Who, where is he the wretch, who dar'd presume / E'en in his heart to hide so black a thought / Much more with open violence to seek / Thy precious life?" Esther turns accusingly to Haman and declares, "O King, the adversary feasts with us / It is this wicked Haman who has caus'd / Thy dread decree to be proclaim'd abroad / That in the month of Adar, I, and all / My race shall be destroy'd."<sup>64</sup> After Haman is led to the gallows, the play concludes with a "Chorus of Jewish Women" who sing, dance, and cry out joyously, "Let the feast of Pur be a day of joy, / The month of Adar a season of gladness! / Bring forth the green bows for tabernacles."<sup>65</sup> Throughout the song, the women praise Esther and call upon the "unborn tribes" to remember that the "Holy One hath redeemed Israel."<sup>66</sup>

The use of "redeem" is problematic in this context, since in the first scene of act I, a character known as "Haggai the Prophet" rebukes the "Jewish captives" in the city for their despair, foretelling the coming of Christ to save them:

For lo—the Sav'ior comes,  
He of all nations they desire shall come,  
And of this latter house shall tread the courts  
Messiah—long foretold by men inspired,  
Messiah—glorious Savior, sent by God,  
Not merely to redeem our captive tribes,  
But to bring light and life good will and peace  
Unto the world. O haste, O hasten, then  
Thy glorious Advent, Saviour of mankind;  
Come bless all nations with thy gospel peace.<sup>67</sup>

"Haggai the Prophet" presents an intriguing conundrum as a character in Tyler's drama. The *Book of Esther* names "Hegai" as a eunuch serving the queen, but does *not* identify him as a prophet. But the Bible also contains a figure known as "Haggai the Prophet" who lived around the time of the

Second Temple (around 520 BCE, after the end of the Jews' captivity in Babylon).<sup>68</sup> By inserting the prophet Haggai into Esther's story, Tyler also implies that Esther has redeemed the Jews to pave the way for their ultimate redemption by the "Messiah—glorious Savior, sent by God." The Jewish celebration of Purim (already perhaps confused by Tyler with the celebration of Sukkot) becomes not a commemoration of a Jewish victory but rather an annual marker of the Jews' ultimate destiny: to convert to Christianity. As Herbert and Ada Lou Carson note, Tyler's ambiguity about Jews' roles in a predominantly Christian culture stretched back at least to the 1790s, as his novel *The Algerine Captive* indicates.<sup>69</sup> In that story, the narrator, Updike Underhill, critiques Jews' love of riches while at the same time acknowledging that Jews have faced severe discrimination. By 1817, he penned the now-lost treatise *The Touchstone; or A Humble, Modest Inquiry into the Nature of Religious Intolerance*. While the work seems to have focused primarily on intolerance among Christian sects, Tyler's novels, treatises, and later plays—particularly *The Origin of the Feast of Purim*—are noteworthy for their efforts to use Jewish figures and Jewish rituals to imagine Jews into a Christian polity, even if that process was predicated on expectation (or hope) of an eventual conversion.<sup>70</sup>

Depictions of Jewish culture like those in Tyler's writings represent a curious Gentile American fascination with the "exotic Jew" as well as contemporary Christian scholarship on Jewish culture. In another example, the 1837 Boston production of *The Feast of Tabernacles* (an innovative and highly successful show combining music, singing, and dance) boasts an elaborate preface, in which the author explains:

An attempt has been made, in the following pages, to produce a representation of the imposing scenes in the Temple on this day, which might be adapted to musical recitation and accompaniment. . . . The author has aimed to be generally faithful to the facts as far as they are known, and has taken no liberties with the subject, excepting that he has not scrupulously adhered to what might be called its costume. He has freely drawn from those passages of the Old Testament which refer to this festival, but has not sought to confine himself to modes of thought and speech exclusively Jewish.<sup>71</sup>

The author also provides extensive footnotes, as well as citations from the Bible, documenting his sources. Yet his suggestion that there *were* in fact

modes of thought and speech that might be "exclusively Jewish" implies that Gentile Americans still imagined undisclosed mysteries about Jewish life that were unknown or unknowable to Christian audiences.<sup>72</sup> Not surprisingly, the validity of this perception is difficult to document. Christian culture had long had access to images that represented Jewish rituals in entirely "Westernized" and accessible ways, including representations of Purim festivals that actually seem to be drawn from *commedia dell'arte* and from late eighteenth-century engravings and paintings of celebrations of the Feast of Tabernacles. One published eighteenth-century image of the Feast of Tabernacles shows men and women in western dress sitting at a banquet table. They are not separated by gender, nor have their clothes been exoticized. Indeed, nothing in the image renders it immediately apparent that its subjects are Jews or that they are engaged in any kind of religious ritual.<sup>73</sup> In contrast to the quietly domestic scenes described above, Ware's drama makes a conscious choice to follow popular stage trends in rendering Jewish characters exotic by taking liberties with the costuming. While the mid-eighteenth century had witnessed some Westernizing of Jewish characters' costumes as in the case of Shylock or the Beau Mordecai, by the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the pendulum had swung back toward more lavish, "oriental" representations that were also consistent with growing appetites for spectacle in British and American theatre.<sup>74</sup>

#### "CHILDREN OF MOSES, EAT AND REJOICE!"

The late 1830s through the 1850s witnessed resurgence of philo-Semitic rhetoric in the American public sphere, as essays on Jewish intellectual achievement in journals such as the *Baltimore Clipper*, the *Trumpet and Universal Magazine*, the *Christian Reflector*, the *Christian Secretary*, and the *New York Observer and Chronicle* attest. For example, the *Baltimore Clipper* proclaimed, "For eighteen hundred years [the Jews] have been plundered, trodden down, banished and put to death in a thousand forms, all of which evils they might have avoided by renouncing their religion, Yet as a people, they have never wavered in their national faith," and Jews appeared admirable for their strong adherence to their traditions in the face of adversity.<sup>75</sup> The same essay also challenged traditional stereotypes of Jews as "pedlars or money jobbers," asserting that, "You never observe a great intellectual movement in Europe in which the Jews do not participate."<sup>76</sup> Despite these sympathet-

ic words, open assimilation remained a challenging proposition for some authors, as a newspaper essay in the *Christian Secretary* suggests: "There is still a *nationality* [sic] about a Jew that distinguishes him from the rest of mankind." Yet a potential solution appeared in the way that contemporary Christian and Jewish scholars consistently invoked Jewish *history* in their writings, rather than issues confronting contemporary Jews. Dramatizing present-day Jewish culture raised troubling questions about Jewish *versus* American identities. Representing *ancient* Jewish history offered a safer way to depict Jewish religious practices without imagining that they infringed on everyday Gentile life.

The 1838 American adaptation of British playwright Thomas Wade's *The Jew of Arragon* produced at Boston's Tremont Theatre offers a useful example of the ways which a focus on Jewish *history* allowed American spectators to relegate issues of anti-Semitism to the past (and perhaps most importantly, to a *European* past). Cuts and modifications made to Wade's original 1830 British text by an American theatre manager hint at efforts to remove any sense of danger to Gentile Americans posed by contemporary Jews, and thus any rationale for anti-Jewish sentiment.

Wade wrote *The Jew of Arragon* in 1830, responding to a rising tide of anti-Semitism in Britain, including an anti-Jewish protest in Covent Garden on October 20, 1830. As Wade notes in his introduction, "My entire subject is Jewish, and the main object of my work has been to embody in a dramatic form, the struggles, triumphs, and sorrows . . . of a noble Hebrew and his David, amid the woes and oppressions of their once mighty voice." The original script is both militant and violent. The play follows Spain's persecution of the Jews and the government's efforts to extort money from its victims. The central figures include a Jewish father named Xavier, his daughter Rachel, and her suitor Alphonso. After refusing to pay an exorbitant tax levied against the Jews of Arragon, Rachel and Xavier help to lead a civil war in which Jews rise up and take power. They are thwarted, and Rachel poisons herself on the altar where she waits to marry Alphonso. Xavier also commits suicide, falling across Rachel's body to form a grisly tableau at the play's close. As Wade notes, "By the characters of Xavier and Rachel, the reader may be not infrequently reminded of the origin of the 'days of Purim.'"<sup>77</sup> The comparison to Purim seems suggestive. While many Jews celebrated Purim with feasts and small community festivals, many Gentiles associated it

with violence and brutality (a 1626 pamphlet even linked Purim to the Gunpowder Plot!). It also suggests why the American version excised so much of the play's violence. While Wade was trying to prove a point to British audiences about Jewish militancy and strength, Gentile American audiences (perhaps still recalling the terror of Nat Turner's uprising only seven years before, or even Mordecai Noah's plans to create a Jewish homeland within New York State in the late 1820s) might not have found it reassuring to imagine that yet another "race" housed on American shores plotted an open rebellion. Thus American stage manager's John Gilbert's promptbook version for the 1838 Boston production shows a diminished display of violence and makes the characters of Rachel and Xavier more pathetic in their suicides. Rendered as *victims* rather than avengers, they meet a fate that parallels so many of their tragic African American counterparts on the national stage: they must die because they cannot be assimilated into a white, Christian body politic.

The same sympathetic treatment prevails in the 1853 Boston production of *The Jewess, or the Council of Constance*.<sup>78</sup> The original British script includes a Passover scene, which remains present in the American production, albeit in an edited form that excises extended references to Jewish *slavery* or bondage; while these were certainly an integral part of the Passover story, the term "slavery" was obviously fraught in pre-Civil War America. The American version also cuts lines and actions that are overtly anti-Semitic, such as crowds cheering at the beating of a Jewish character. The play (which enjoyed successful runs in Boston, New York, Cincinnati, Sacramento, New Orleans, Washington, DC, and elsewhere) deals in part with how Jews kept their ritual celebrations hidden from Gentiles in times of persecution. Since, as I have suggested earlier, many Americans prided themselves on belonging to a nation that gave "to bigotry no sanction," scenes of Jewish persecution in *other* lands had the potential to reinforce their satisfaction in or commitment to American religious tolerance.

The opening scenes of the play present a defense of Jews' rights to participate in Gentile society, suggesting that Jewish religious practices are *not* alien or frightening. Yet in act 2, when Leopold—a prince who disguises himself as a Jew to woo the beautiful maiden Rachel—comes to Rachel's house to share Passover dinner, the clash between Jewish and Gentile traditions and the impossibility of any Jewish-Gentile assimilation becomes apparent.

The stage directions offer a meticulous description of the scene:

*A Hall in the house of Eleazar. Doors on each side. A large Arch in the centre, before which is a massy Curtain. Eleazar steals on cautiously, followed by Rachel and Leopold. He beckons Jews and Jewesses, who enter in stealth and secrecy, the Jews on the right, the Jewesses on the left.—Stage dark.*

More elaborate stage directions follow:

*At a sign of Eleazar, the Curtain at the back is suddenly raised, and discovers a Table richly set out with Paschal Lamb, Unleavened Bread, Bitter Herbs, &c, &c, brilliantly illuminated with numerous candelabra.—A glowing transparency at the back representing the passing of the Children of Israel through the Red Sea. Omnes burst forth into the Grand Chorus, “The Horse and his Rider.”*

GRAND CHORUS: The horse and his rider were o’erthrown in the Red Sea / Shout then Sons of Israel, for we triumph gloriously!

ELEAZAR: Children of Moses, eat and rejoice. Welcome the season of your deliverance from the fiery furnace of affliction. The house of bondage.<sup>79</sup>

The representation of Passover in this production obviously contains a strong element of spectacle, but it also seems intended to *educate* its audience as well (especially the “glowing transparency” representing the Jews’ flight from Egypt).

After the characters enter for the feast, the stage directions note: “Eleazar distributes the Unleavened Bread: the last to whom it is presented is Leopold.” Though he has been observing the ritual silently up to this point, the invitation to actually *participate* frightens Leopold, who exclaims in an aside, “Hypocrite as I am, I dare not mingle in their impious rites—’twere sacrilege!” According to the stage directions, Leopold “Watches his opportunity to throw away the Unleavened Bread unseen by those present, but is observed by Rachel, who is anxiously regarding him.” She too cries in an aside, “What do I see? He does not raise it to his lips, he casts it from him: rejects the test of faith!”<sup>80</sup>

Leopold fails his “test of faith.” Despite his love for Rachel and his (up to that moment) successful masquerade as a Jew, he interprets participation in a Jewish ritual as the ultimate act of assimilation, a step he cannot force himself to take. Fortunately for Leopold, the final scenes of the play reveal



that Rachel was, in fact, a Christian, secretly raised by Jews. The revelation that she is not in fact of the Jewish *race* frees Leopold to marry her. She will discard her Jewish traditions and adopt Christian ceremonies. Indeed, the audience may infer that her original Christian baptism has somehow inoculated her against the potential "contamination" of Jewish religious practices.

I have argued that Jewish rituals were rendered as both secret and exotic on the antebellum American stage. Yet Gentile Americans—at least those living in urban centers—had many opportunities to learn about Jewish religious practices in their daily lives, through empirical observation or through literary magazines, journals, or newspapers. Still they seem to have acquired comparatively little awareness about contemporary ritual celebrations of Jewish faith. Perhaps renditions of Jewish religious practices as "archaic" or "other," like those described above, tricked out in fantastical costumes and larded with biblical quotations, ultimately allowed some spectators to relegate the Jewish faith to the *past*, rather than imagining it as part of an American *future*.

#### "APPEALING TO THE HEARTS OF A PEOPLE"

In the concluding section of this chapter I turn briefly to three Jewish American playwrights whose writings expressed a different vision than simply educating Gentiles in the history of Judaism or encouraging greater tolerance: Isaac Harby, a Charleston-born playwright and reformer; Samuel B. H. Judah, the promising young playwright whose outspoken criticism of his fellow New Yorkers drew widespread criticism and effectively ended his public dramatic career (though not his habit of writing plays); and playwright, novelist, and editor Herman M. Moos. Though I have discussed each of these three in previous chapters, here I examine ways in which their work engaged with calls for Jewish religious reform. Harby, Judah, and Moos each advocated reform of the Jewish faith and demanded a turn away from what they perceived as outdated superstitions and outmoded practices.

Harby began writing plays in 1806, though his best-known drama, *Alberti*, would not be staged in the Charleston playhouse until 1817. *Alberti* drew no less a figure than President James Monroe to a performance in Charleston on April 30, 1819, the first recorded attendance of a US president at the work of a Jewish American playwright. In addition to his work as a dramatist, Harby forged a career as a critic and was outspoken about the

need to purge American drama of unworthy Jewish characters lingering in the repertoire.<sup>81</sup> Harby also believed that theatre could have a strong positive impact on its audiences:

There have been instances in which, appealing to the hearts of a people, [the theatre's] political impulse has been irresistible. . . . Let the temples of the dramatic muse become not only the rendezvous of fashion, and of taste, but let them redeem our youth from the dull excitement of the tavern, the poisonous contact of the gaming tables. Let the theatre entice their steps to the sight of female circles, of soft and refined emotion; and moulding them, as it were, by the orphan power of poetry, into creatures of civilized society, objects and attentions, where still linger the last beams and vestiges of chivalry.<sup>82</sup>

With the need to reform the drama in mind, *Alberti* (a story set in the age of Lorenzo de Medici) lacked some of the sensation and spectacle that audiences had grown to expect, as Harby noted in the preface to the 1819 edition of the work: "An objection is made against this piece, which I readily admit. It has neither thunder, lightning, assassination, banditti, battles, scenery, nor song to recommend it. Probably my aim was higher, or my taste not exactly conformable to the admirers of Melo-Dramatic extravaganza."<sup>83</sup> Harby also challenged critics who disdained his play because it was written by a native playwright:

The last objection against 'Alberti'—is the most formidable—it is an *American production!* To this charge (as I do not know how to get over it) I must plead guilty. I have even the hardihood openly to acknowledge, nay, be proud of the accident of birth which has placed me under the protection of laws that I revere, and in the bosom of a country that I love. It is surely time for transatlantic critics to borrow the assistance of 'sweet oblivion' and allow her to soften down those feelings and prejudices which have grown out of past hostilities.<sup>84</sup>

As Harby's various writings attest, he envisioned himself as an advocate for American audiences and American drama. He also assumed the role of a religious reformer in a community he perceived as increasingly under threat during the mid-1820s. According to historian Gary Zola, prior to 1825 Isaac Harby had demonstrated "only minimal interest in Judaism or Jewish communal affairs."<sup>85</sup> But the escalating efforts to convert Jews as part of the Sec-

ond Great Awakening inspired a group of Jews in Charleston to style themselves the "Reformed Society of Israelites." The society held its first recorded meeting on November 21, 1824. A convention of Israelites met on December 23, 1824, to forward a series of complaints to the Adjunta (the governing board of the congregation). Concerns included the inability of many of the congregants to understand services offered only in Hebrew (rather than Hebrew and English); the problem of requesting donations mid-service, rather than subscription; services that went on too long; and the absence of any more scholarly discourse on texts in lieu of rote recitation of familiar passages. The Adjunta refused the society's recommendation on the grounds that the synagogue's constitution prohibited changes without either the *parnassim* (executive officers) calling a meeting or the Adjunta calling a meeting, or if two-thirds of all subscribers ask for a meeting. Undaunted, on January 16, 1825, the group restyled itself the "Reformed Society of Israelites for Promoting the True Principles of Judaism According to its Purity and Spirit."

Why would someone like Harby who had, as Zola notes, demonstrated comparatively little interest in religious reform prior to 1825 ally himself with this group? While the larger trends of the Second Great Awakening stirred unease among many Jewish Americans, an 1823 incident may have hit closer to home for Harby when Joseph S. C. F. Frey, a notorious convert from Judaism, came to lecture in Charleston in 1823. Southern newspapers such as the *Charleston Times*, the *Charleston Mercury*, the *Southern Patriot*, and the *Southern Evangelical Intelligencer* circulated stories about Frey and his support of the Society for Ameliorating the Condition of the Jews.<sup>86</sup> Also, as Zola notes, generational differences played a role: Charleston's Jewish reformers represented a group of younger, native-born Jews; by contrast Adjunta members averaged around age sixty and were mostly naturalized citizens.<sup>87</sup>

Harby's activism drew both praise and criticism from Jewish Americans throughout the country. Mordecai Noah dismissed Harby as a "new light" reformer and claimed Harby wanted to undermine his (Noah's) Ararat venture.<sup>88</sup> And indeed, Harby had mocked Noah's project, calling it a "vain, visionary, and mirth-provoking scheme of Jewish empire" and claiming that he offered a much more rational plan for the nation's Jewish community.<sup>89</sup> Others, such as educator Jacob Mordecai, attacked Harby as too ignorant of the works of the great Jewish scholars to offer any cogent critiques of the faith and claimed that Harby's labeling of the United States as a new Israel was misleading and harmful.<sup>90</sup> Despite their critics, the society made plans to build a new synagogue and publish the first reform prayer book.

While the prayer book would be published in 1830, Harby would not live to see it. He died of typhoid on December 14, 1828, after leaving Charleston for New York City. Moreover, the society had lost some of its momentum by the late 1820s. During the end of the 1820s Charleston slid into a severe economic depression that left families bankrupt, theatres empty, and various charitable ventures unsupported. Worsening financial conditions prompted many—including several members of the reform society—to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Other members succumbed to family or community pressures to renounce the group. By 1833, the society had to return the funds it had raised for its synagogue, and it ceased to operate entirely by 1838.<sup>91</sup>

If the “Reformed Society of Israelites” of 1820s Charleston had found its community too hidebound and conservative in its practices, playwright Samuel B. H. Judah found the faith mired in superstition and hypocrisy by the mid-1830s. Judah, son of a prominent New York family, began writing plays and poetry in his early twenties. Remembered for his scathing wit, Judah is best known for two pieces, the comedy *A Tale of Lexington* (1823) and his *Dunciad*-style epic poem *Gotham and the Gothamites* (1823) (see figure 8). *A Tale of Lexington* undertakes a comic retelling of the Battle of Lexington and Concord, and some scholars argue that it features coded Jewish characters, making it the first Jewish-American-authored play to situate Jewish characters in the American Revolution. Popular at its debut on July 4, 1822, *A Tale of Lexington* was not long-lived in the American repertoire. Judah’s other well-known piece, *Gotham and the Gothamites*, was a poetic satire poking fun at the city’s most prominent figures, including Mordecai Noah, whom Judah derided as “pertinacious scribbler” of “insipid garbage.”<sup>92</sup> Judah’s work earned him the enmity of his fellow New Yorkers, who successfully prosecuted him for libel, effectively ending his career in the New York theatre. Judah eventually left New York for Philadelphia and his subsequent plays, including *David and Uriah* (1835), were published anonymously and not performed publicly.<sup>93</sup>

*David and Uriah* chronicles the adventures of King David and Bathsheba, the wife he stole from his loyal follower Uriah, yet this episode is only one of a series of treacheries David commits in Judah’s play. For Judah, David represents the ultimate traitor to the Jews; he performs acts of great savagery against his enemies, all in the name of the “Chosen People” and supposedly with the blessing of God, yet at the same time he shows himself unafraid to collude with his enemies, to lull them into believing themselves safe until it is too late. In the preface of the work, Judah declares, “The following Drama is offered to the public, not from any dislike towards those who honestly

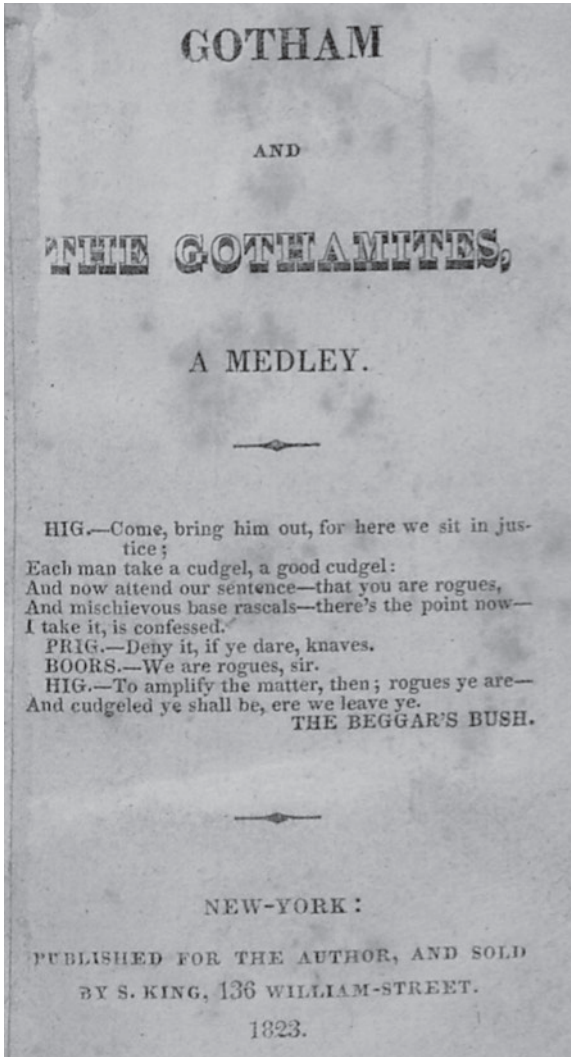


Fig. 8. Title page for *Gotham and the Gothamites* by Samuel B. H. Judah. (Collection of Princeton University Library, Leonard L. Milberg Collection of Jewish American Writers.)

support a system of theology founded upon the Jewish Legends; but from a desire that people should examine these incredible tales through the medium of plain, unsophisticated common sense. The author of the succeeding pages has endeavoured to confine himself as much as possible to the letter and spirit of the Sacred Scrip, and should anyone complain that the Lord's anointed has not been treated with sufficient courtesy, the reply is—BEHOLD THE BOOK!!"<sup>94</sup> Judah claims, "There is scarcely to be found on the records of human depravity an individual whose life has been marked

with more acts of atrocity than that of holy David; if we admit the truth of his history as given in the books of Samuel," and he observes that "Science and philosophy, in their sure and steady progress, have already cleared away much of the holy rubbish of ancient ignorance and superstition." He urges his readers to "anticipate in the future, a period not far distant, when man will no longer through a blind and slavish devotion to supernatural phantoms, uphold a system which is shown by its own history to have always been at war with equal rights and human liberty."<sup>95</sup>

While this hostile revision of David's story might seem shocking and noteworthy in itself, perhaps even more compelling is the figure of the wandering Jew that Judah inserts at the end of the play, a figure that may be interpreted as representing Judah himself. The character of Alluah enters to lament the present state of Judaism and to prophesy its reform. Unlike other dramas or novels of the period cited above, which see conversion to Christianity as the only way to "reform" Judaism, the end of *David and Uriah* makes a strong case for reform within the Jewish faith.

Through various realms and kingdoms of the earth/  
 I've wander'd forth to learn the ways of men/  
 And gain instruction from the wise and good.  
 I find the greatest happiness abounds  
 Where men's divinities are truth and love.  
 The more people worship things unseen/  
 The less do they regard the social ties,  
 Or feel compassion for the human race. . . .  
 A God of mercy would make known his will;  
 A God of justice would speak plain to all;  
 A God all-seeing knows what man requires;  
 A God all-powerful wants not human aid;  
 A God impartial has no chosen few.<sup>96</sup>

Judah's play *The Maid of Midian* launches similar attacks on hidebound Jewish traditions, as its title page declares: "What dire calamities do mortals feel from holy rage and superstitious zeal."<sup>97</sup> The play chronicles the conquest of Midian and the Jews' massacre of their prisoners, an atrocity Judah claims some have trouble crediting. "Yet strange as it may appear, there are many persons in the present age of light and intelligence, who not only profess to believe in all the Jewish massacres as related to their divine book, but who also justify those acts of barbarity; and are not ashamed to say they were

wisely ordered by a just God, whose tender mercies are all over his works."<sup>98</sup> The play opens at the "Jewish Camp on the Plains of Moab" with Moses declaring that God has told the Israelites to kill the Midians. The play is peppered with Judah's signature sly commentary, including a footnote when Aaron refers to the people's gold: "Read the story of the golden calf in the thirty-second chapter of Exodus, and then ask any chemical philosopher if gold can be burned to powder, or reduced to ashes by fire. And then ask yourselves if this affair does not seem like a cunning project of Moses and the priests to get the people's gold."<sup>99</sup> And in a supremely sarcastic stage direction, Judah states that after massacring all the men of Midian but sparing the women and children, "God's chosen people retire."<sup>100</sup> The play's epilogue is equally pointed:

What dreadful woes are nations doom'd to feel  
From bigot's rage and superstitious zeal!  
As long as mortals place their fondest hopes  
On senseless fables and ambiguous tropes;  
And learn God's words from tales of ancient times  
And form their morals from a book of crimes,  
So long will ceaseless strife afflict mankind  
And holy fear enthrall the human mind.  
But when the light of science shall expand  
And truth and reason spread o'er every land  
From thrones of blood will kings and priests be hurl'd  
And peace and friendship renovate the world.  
Jehovah's Hebrew bigots truth pursue  
And no more claim to be the chosen few . . .  
Enfranchised mortals then unaw'd may call  
NATURE'S ETERNAL SOUL THE GOD OF ALL  
And need no flames below or thrones above  
To teach them truth, humanity and love.<sup>101</sup>

After Judah called the Bible a "book of crimes," accused Moses of stealing the Jews' gold instead of destroying the golden calf, and described the Jewish forefathers of the Old Testament as bigots, it is small wonder, perhaps, that Judah's barbed satires never made it to the public stage. But Judah's preference for the dramatic form allowed him to ridicule the actions of his protagonists in a way that novels or even poetry might not have permitted. Whether Judah's animus was personal, or driven by a larger conviction



that Judaism was encumbered by too much superstition and too many outdated traditions to survive, is difficult to determine. Certainly Judah's writings shift the focus of their attacks by the mid-1830s. While *Gotham and the Gothamites* satirized the pretensions of the New York establishment in the 1820s, the poem offers no specific antireligious sentiment on the level of his later plays. Judah's later writings may reflect the Haskalah, also known as the Jewish Enlightenment, a movement emphasizing reason, secular culture, and philosophy. It made its way through European Jewry from the late eighteenth century into the nineteenth century, and it also helped impel the movement for religious reform. Judah's repeated references to enlightenment and reason as the enemies of superstition and bigotry suggest at least some acquaintance with and sympathy for the reform efforts in both Europe and the United States.<sup>102</sup>

I have returned to Herman M. Moos's *Mortara; or, the Pope and his Inquisitors* at several points throughout this study, and I reach back to it in one brief epilogue to this chapter for Moos's tacit acknowledgment of the growing schism in Jewish American religious beliefs by the mid-nineteenth century. In a scene in which Mortara's allies try to reassure him that the pope will not resist the pleas of leaders around the world to free his kidnapped son, Abraham, the boy's tutor, proclaims that Mortara has the support of "Reformer Wise" and "Senior [*sic*] Leaser."<sup>103</sup> Abraham thus invokes the names of Isaac Mayer Wise (rabbi of Cincinnati's reform temple, Beth K.K. B'nai Yeshurun) and his frequent sparring partner, conservative Jewish newspaper editor and historian Isaac Leiser of Philadelphia. While Wise and Leiser differed fundamentally in their opinions on the future of American Judaism, they united in their demands that Italian Catholic officials return Mortara's child. In the play, Abraham refers to the men as "two young lions" and "brave leaders" fighting side by side against oppression.<sup>104</sup>

Although fleeting, Moos's reference to Wise and Leiser points back to a period of extraordinary development in Jewish American history. The isolated *conversos* and *renegados* that peopled the early national stage when newly arrived Jewish immigrants could scarcely scrape together enough fellow Jews for services had given way to depictions of communities asserting their religious freedom and challenging traditions. The changes had not been easy nor had they expunged the more stereotypical representations of Judaism found in the plays of Royall Tyler, Henry Ware, and others. Nevertheless, they paved the way for the next generation of playwrights' and performers' open celebration of Jewish faith, Jewish history, and Jewish tradition.

## Epilogue

### Idealists and Dreamers

On December 17, 1862, General Ulysses S. Grant's wartime command force issued "Order no. 11," expelling "Jews as a class" from Tennessee, Mississippi, and Kentucky on the grounds that some Jewish residents had been speculating in goods and gouging hapless fellow citizens.<sup>1</sup> Roughly one hundred years before, angry colonists had denounced as Shylocks or "Jews" those who failed to comply with boycotts of British goods. Those looking on in wonder and dismay must have wondered what, if anything, had changed about the image of Jews in American culture. And yet . . . by the coming of the Civil War, Jewish American actors, playwrights, and managers had begun to establish significant roles for themselves in American culture, joining that "never-ending" list of Jewish artists described by actress Mary Ann Keeley. Amateur theatre companies provided venues for young Jewish men and some women to dabble in dramatic projects as well. Those artists contributed characters and plays to the American stage lexicon that helped audiences rethink familiar stereotypes and long-standing prejudices.

Much of this study has examined questions of what and why: what kinds of Jewish stereotypes appeared on antebellum stages and why did those types manifest or recur at certain strategic moments in US history. I hope it has also addressed questions of *how* in a more historiographical context. How do theatre scholars pursue stereotypes to better understand their social and cultural functions? How does a researcher look not only through but *across* the archive and the repertoire for dramatic encounters that give new meanings to familiar characters? If a stereotype holds open a moment in history, how does the scholar step through that portal? What tools, resources, and data allow that imaginative leap?

Traversing a history of stereotypes feels like walking through a hall of mirrors and seeing a series of infinitely refracted reflections as images recede further and further "into" the mirror. This kind of vision is disorienting, but in

mutual acts of memory making, points of origin disappear as spectators and subjects merge in the tenuous reality of the image in the mirror. But mirroring is a far from passive project, as anyone who has ever played mirror games in an acting class (or seen a Marx Brothers movie or an "I Love Lucy" episode) can attest. Mirror games involve both parties in careful observations of each other's behavior, and while the goal may be to dissolve the apparent boundaries between the two, they remain distinct. Thus while playwrights or performers may have sought to "mirror" Jewishness for their audiences, that collaboration only underscored audience members' agency in the process.

Throughout this study I have returned to the word "conspicuous." The word caught my imagination early on because it allowed me to explore questions of agency and perception. Conspicuousness is not accidental. It is made by combinations of choices, including choices to practice a faith and choices to reward or punish others for the free exercise of that faith. I hope that my study has also asked how the researcher can understand Jewish Americans' conspicuousness in antebellum culture as the product of a series of choices. In exercising their constitutional right (and, one might argue, innate human right) to freedom of faith and conscience, Jewish Americans exercised their right to choose. Those repeated choices—questioned and reaffirmed on a daily basis—inevitably triggered a series of other choices (note I say "choices" not "responses") that eventually brought Shylock, Sheva, Nathan the Wise, Leah, and so many other characters to the American stage.

While the repeated emphasis on choice may seem obvious, it feels important to underscore that repertoires—like archives—may be products of choice as much as they are products of chance and survival. Each of the characters I have discussed entered the repertoire and the archive because of a cascading series of choices, and each also remained or receded based on a series of choices. There is nothing *inevitable* about stereotypes, although they may become so familiar that audiences assume they have "always" been there. Yet I have cited examples of artists and audiences acknowledging the inaccuracy or offensiveness of certain stereotypes and choosing to withdraw them from circulation, even if only temporarily. Novelist Maria Edgeworth renounced her anti-Semitism at Rachel Mordecai's urging. Charleston theatre managers withdrew a problematic production after protests from Jewish audiences. Philadelphia newspapers admitted that Jews had been "much maligned" by negative types onstage. I have also offered instances in which Jewish artists such as Mordecai Noah or "Nosey" Phillips chose to draw attention to their heritage and reaped both positive and negative responses

based on how audiences chose to respond, whether in lauding Noah's production of *Yusef Caramalli* for showing the "truth" of his experiences in Tunis, or labeling Phillips a Shylock for his canny business practices.

I have stated repeatedly that no story of Jewish representation on the American stage can offer a clear progression from negative to positive, from outsider to citizen. Revolutionary characters shared stages with regressive ones. Claims that Shylock's character revealed Jews' humanity appeared in the same newspapers that denounced his malevolent behavior as "typically" Jewish. Debates over Jewish identity on the national stage would only grow more contentious in years to come as new Jewish immigrants flooded into the United States, seeking refuge from intolerable conditions elsewhere. Anti-Semitic bias would resurface in response to these new Americans. Jewish stage characters would grow broader and religious communities more fractured. Despite this chaos—or perhaps as a result of it—post-Civil War American stages witnessed a significant shift in representations of Jewish characters and the visibility of Jewish American artists. The rapid rise in immigration, the establishment of Yiddish theatres, and the changing nature of American entertainments created unprecedented opportunities for Jewish artists in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. I am struck by the shift in tone that I mark by the early twentieth century as authors, both Jewish and Gentile, began to speculate on what they perceived as the sudden *conspicuousness* of Jewish artists.

In 1860 Herman Moos challenged his fellow Jews to rouse themselves against oppression, demanding, "Are these the men that shook the world of old?"<sup>2</sup> For me, the antebellum playwrights, performers, and audience members who chose to challenge familiar stereotypes and introduce new voices to the racial, ethnic, and religious cacophony swelling in the American playhouse did indeed shake the world. In a 1921 essay titled "What the American Stage Owes the Jew," the author speculated that the American theatre would not be as well-organized and profitable as it was without the Jews, but he added, "Nor is the Jewish manager merely a businessman. He is and always has been a man who sees visions and dreams dreams. The Jew is preeminently the idealist and dreamer among the races of men."<sup>3</sup> Postwar artists owed much to the men and women who "shook the world of old" and had visions of opportunities for Jewish American artists in the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War. The work of artists such as Noah, Phillips, Menken, Eytinge, Judah, and others offered American audiences their first glimpses into the extraordinary imagination and talents of the nation's Jewish citizens and permanently enriched the American repertoire.



# Notes

## Introduction

1. George O. Willard, *History of the Providence Stage, 1762–1891* (Providence: Rhode Island News Company, 1891), 5.

2. For recent works that have explored the post–Civil War period through the twenty-first century, see the following excellent monographs: Harley Erdman, *Staging the Jew: The Performance of an American Ethnicity, 1860–1920* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Henry Bial, *Acting Jewish: Negotiating Ethnicity on the American Stage and Screen* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); and Julius Novick, *Beyond the Golden Door: Jewish American Drama and Jewish American Experience* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

3. For just some of the works by these prolific scholars, see Dianne Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997); Lee M. Friedman, *Jewish Pioneers and Patriots* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1942); Louis Harap, *The Image of the Jew in American Literature from Early Republic to Mass Immigration* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974); Frederic Cople Jaher, *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness: The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Jacob R. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew, 1492–1776* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970); William Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles in Early America, 1654–1800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Gary Phillip Zola, *Isaac Harby of Charleston, 1788–1828: Jewish Reformer and Intellectual* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994).

4. Heather S. Nathans, “A Much Maligned People: Jews on and off the Stage in the Early American Republic,” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 2, no. 2 (2004): 310–11. I discuss these advertisements in chapter 3.

5. Almost every racial or ethnic minority found itself rendered as a stereotype at some point on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American stages, as drunken Irishmen, parsimonious Scots, buffoonish Africans, savage Native Americans, and lustful Turks. Jews proved no exception to this pantheon of demeaning characters.

6. Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 36.

7. Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 6.

8. Mercantile Advertiser (New York), May 17, 1799. The *Morning Chronicle* (December 8, 1804) praised Cooper for his choice *not* to play Shylock as a buffoon, claiming that his Shylock represented a “combined operation of hatred, malice, and revenge,” with a vexed spirit agitated by “the fanaticism of religious bigotry.” The paper also claims that the incidents in

the play had been based on real events, though it declares that Shakespeare had reversed the original scenario (which supposedly featured a Christian acting against a Jew) to suit the prejudices of his times.

9. Carlson, *Haunted Stage*, 5.

10. Jonathan D. Sarna, "The 'Mythical Jew' and the 'Jew Next Door' in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Anti-Semitism in Nineteenth-Century American History*, ed. David A. Gerber (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 63.

11. Nathans, "A Much Maligned People," 312.

12. Sarna, "The Mythical Jew," 70.

13. For examples, see Henry Ware Jr., *The Feast of Tabernacles: A Poem for Music in two parts* (Cambridge, MA: John Owen, 1837); Elizabeth Polack, *Esther, The Royal Jewess, or The Death of Haman!* (London: J. Duncombe & Co, 1835); W. T. Montcrieff, esp. *The Jewess, or the Council of Constance, an Historical Drama in Three Acts* (New York: Samuel French, 1853?). All available in the Harvard Theatre Collection. While some of these plays have British authors, each was produced in the United States and adapted for American audiences. Their adaptations often reveal a great deal about what they imagine their audiences will or will not tolerate, as with the 1838 promptbook for Thomas Wade, *The Jew of Arragon, or The Hebrew Queen. A Tragedy in Five Acts* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1830) housed at the Harvard Theatre Collection (the alterations make the Jewish characters less overtly radical).

14. Bial, *Acting Jewish*, 16.

15. Bial, *Acting Jewish*, 16–17.

16. Joseph Lyons, "The Diary," *American Jewish History* 91, no. 3–4 (September/December 2003): 528.

17. As Laura Leibman notes, colonial census takers frequently expressed confusion as to whether Jews constituted a religion or a race: "Sometimes Jews were 'white' (albeit of a different religion), sometimes they stood alone in a quasi-racial category between 'blacks' and 'whites,' sometimes they were a religious group." See Laura A. Leibman, "The Crossroads of American History: Jews in the Colonial Americas," in *By Dawn's Early Light: Jewish Contributions to American Culture from the Nation's Founding to the Civil War*, ed. Adam Mendelsohn (Princeton: Princeton University Library, 2016), 20.

18. Leibman, "The Crossroads of American History," 13.

19. Jonathan Sarna, "Port Jews in the Atlantic: Further Thoughts," *Jewish History* 20 (June 2006): 217, quoted in Adam Mendelsohn, "Tongue Ties: The Emergence of the Anglophone Jewish Diaspora in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *American Jewish History* 93, no. 2 (June 2007): 179. For more on Port Jews, see Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500–1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

20. Sarna, "Port Jews," 213–14.

21. Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles*.

22. Regine Rosenthal, "Inventing the Other: Ambivalent Constructions of the Wandering Jew/ess in Nineteenth Century American Literature," in *Representations of Jews through the Ages—Studies in Jewish Civilization* 8, ed. Leonard Jay Greenspoon and Bryan F. Le Beau (Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 1996), 173.

23. See Harap, "American Journeys of the Wandering Jew," in *The Image of the Jew in American Literature from Early Republic to Mass Immigration* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974).

24. Quoted in Walter Goodman, *The Keeleys: On the Stage and at Home* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1895), 244–45.



25. Lois M. Foster, *Annals of the San Francisco Stage, 1850–1880* (San Francisco: Federal Theatre Projects, 1936), 1:415.

26. The following works discuss roles for Jewish American women in antebellum culture: Ellen Schiff, “What Kind of Way Is That for Nice Jewish Girls to Act?": Images of Jewish Women in Modern American Drama,” *American Jewish History* 70, no. 1 (September 1980): 106–19; Ashton, Rebecca Gratz; Hasia R. Diner and Beryl Lieff Benderly, *Her Works Praise Her: A History of Jewish Women in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Perseus Books, 2002); Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery: Finding a Place for Women in American Judaism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Emily Bingham, *Mordecai: An Early American Family* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003).

27. Kimberly Snyder Manganelli, *Transatlantic Spectacles of Race: The Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

28. Gratz was reputed to have inspired Sir Walter Scott's character Rebecca in his novel *Ivanhoe*. See Rebecca Gratz to Maria (Mrs. Benjamin) Gratz, April 4, 1820, Gratz Family Papers, American Jewish Historical Society.

29. Quoted in Bingham, *Mordecai*, 67.

30. Diary of Mrs. Smith, February 3, 1793–July 12, 1793, undated entry, 14, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

31. “Jews in the Theatrical Business—Are There Any Racial Reasons for Their Influx Into the Dramatic Professions?” in *American Hebrew* 86, no. 24 (April 15, 1910): 635.

## Chapter One

1. For an excellent discussion of this phenomenon see Jaher, *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness*.

2. Harley Erdman offers a compelling discussion of the development of the Jewish male character in chapter 1 (“Making the Jewish Villain Visible”) of *Staging the Jew*. Erdman notes that Jewish characters were often assigned stage behaviors outside the familiar lexicon of American masculine conduct, a process that may “reflect gentile misunderstandings of certain characteristics of Jewish culture,” or serve as “a strategy for neutralizing a threatening presence” (*Staging the Jew*, 38).

3. Erdman, *Staging the Jew*, 38.

4. Cited in Edward Colman, “Plays of Jewish Interest on the American Stage, 1752–1851,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 33 (1934): 183.

5. For more on the development of this role see John Gross, *Shylock: A Legend and its Legacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

6. See Jaher, *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness*, 128. In this comprehensive study, Jaher suggests that the original American Shylock “was almost certainly depicted by the British touring company as a harsh vindictive figure.” While this does not appear to have been the case with Hallam's company, it is certainly telling that audiences *expected* this kind of portrayal, as the response I cited above suggests. The 1752 production of *Merchant* may have been an instance in which the audience's stereotype was out of “sync” with the performers. As a recognizably Irish performer playing a Jewish clown, Malone's performance may have added a double layer of absurdity to the role.

7. Hugh F. Rankin, *The Theater in Colonial America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 48–55. The Hallam Company's failure to emulate Macklin's interpretation may be surprising, since touring companies often boasted of showcasing the “latest”

trends. However, since Macklin had killed Hallam's brother in a backstage brawl some years earlier, perhaps the choice is less surprising.

8. Rankin, *The Theater in Colonial America*, 144.

9. The Townshend Acts of 1767 imposed taxes on various imported goods such as paint, paper, lead, and tea.

10. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew*, 2:1132. Pencak notes that there were a number of prominent Jews who complied with the nonimportation agreements. See William Pencak, "Jews and Anti-Semitism in Early Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 126, no. 3 (July 2002): 373.

11. Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles*, 229.

12. Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry, 1776–1985* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), vol. 1, 67.

13. Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 1:68–69.

14. Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 1:68–69.

15. Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 1:70.

16. The epithet "little Jew" persisted into the nineteenth century. For example, in an 1806 review of *Love à la Mode*, the author complimented the actor Mr. Francis on his personation of the "little Jew" [sic]. See *The Theatrical Censor* (Philadelphia), January 4, 1806.

17. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Duenna*, scene 1, act III, and Richard Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*, in *Plays for the Theatre: Anthology of World Drama*, 3rd ed., ed. Oscar and Lenyth Brockett (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1979).

18. In 1783, Salomon joined with other Jews in Philadelphia to protest the state's laws debarring Jews from being elected or serving in "any civil office." Reported in *The Pennsylvania Packet and General Advertiser*, December 23, 1783.

19. Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 1:70.

20. "Test Acts" generally required that male citizens seeking certain rights swear oaths of loyalty on a Christian Bible. Some states repealed their test laws soon after the Revolution, while others waited until the first decades of the nineteenth century.

21. The wartime restrictions disappointed many Jews who had been long settled in the colonies. See Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 1:84–85.

22. Letter from Jonas Phillips to the Federal Constitutional Convention, September 7, 1787. Printed in Morris U. Schappes, *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States, 1654–1875* (New York: Citadel Press, 1950), 68–69. It should be noted that Phillips's claim that all Jews were Whigs during the Revolution is disingenuous, since there were several prominent Jewish loyalists.

23. Article 6, section 3 of the *Constitution of the United States*. Available at [http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html). This particular section is also quoted as part of a discussion about Jews' postwar rights in the United States in Morton Borden, *Jews, Turks, and Infidels* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 5.

24. Benjamin Rush, quoted in Borden, *Jews, Turks, and Infidels*, 5. The post-Revolutionary rights accorded to Jews after the revocation of the Test Acts might be compared with the discrimination theatregoers would have witnessed Shylock facing in *Merchant*. Shylock's property is confiscated and he is forced to renounce his faith.

25. Description of the character Mordecai in Charles Macklin's *Love à la Mode*, in *Four Comedies by Charles Macklin*, ed. J. O. Bartley (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1968), 48.

26. One contingent of militia in South Carolina even became known as the "Jew Company" because of the large number of Jewish members.

27. Numerous petitions, some dating back to 1783, are included in Schappes' *A Documentary History of the Jews*.

28. Since the play was performed as an afterpiece (a short entertainment at the end of the evening), it was seldom reviewed by critics, who tended to focus only on the primary play or on new entertainments. Its popularity can be gauged, however, by the frequency with which it appears in theatrical advertisements from its debut in 1767 through the first decades of the 1800s.

29. Michael Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation: Jews and Other Outlandish Englishmen in Georgian Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

30. Jeffrey H. Richards, *Theater Enough: American Culture and the Metaphor of the World Stage, 1607–1789* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

31. Macklin, *Love à la Mode*, 45.

32. Macklin, *Love à la Mode*, 51.

33. Macklin's description of the character is quoted in Macklin, *Love à la Mode*, 48.

34. Pencak describes ongoing attacks that ranged from letters in newspapers to the desecration of Jewish cemeteries in the 1780s and 1790s. See Pencak's sixth chapter of *Jews and Gentiles*.

35. The full text of Washington's letter addressed to the Jews of Newport, Rhode Island, is available at <http://www.tourosynagogue.org/history-learning/gw-letter>

36. Religious affiliation never disappeared from dialogues about Jewish "otherness," but Elizabeth Maddock Dillon presents an argument for the ways in which race rivaled religion in the debate over citizenship. See Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "Slaves in Algiers: Race, Republican Genealogies, and the Global Stage," *American Literary History* 16, no. 3 (2004): 407–36.

37. For more information see Dillon, "Slaves in Algiers." Playwright and novelist Royall Tyler discusses Jewish rights and discrimination in *The Algerine Captive*, ed. Don L. Cook (New Haven, CT: College and University Press, 1970), 178–79. Though by no means philo-Semitic in tone, Tyler's work at least acknowledges this history of oppression.

38. While Virginia had implemented a religious toleration act in 1785, it could not erase residual religious biases. I thank Alec Dun for drawing my attention to the series of essays in the *Federal Gazette* linking Jewish and African American political rights. See *Federal Gazette*, May 15, 1793; July 19, 1793; July 31, 1793; and August 7, 1793. The reference to "negroes" being appointed as town clerks alludes to the election of "Black Tom," a free black citizen who, according to the author, could neither read nor write and whose election, the author argued, "was intended as a burlesque of that of the Burgess" (*Federal Gazette*, August 7, 1793). See also the *National Gazette*, July 1793, for accounts of this incident.

39. *General Advertiser*, July 28, 1791; *Gazette of the United States*, July 30, 1791. Perhaps not the least of the Federalists' objections to Jewish campaigns for greater political freedom was that the French had already beaten them to it and that for many Federalists, the emancipation of the Jews seemed to represent yet another excess of the Jacobin regime. See, Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 1:122–23.

40. *Aurora*, January 14, 1795. Also see review in the *Aurora* from June 16, 1794, which praises Chalmers as an "admirable Shylock."

For information on Chalmers' career, see Thomas Clark Pollock, *The Philadelphia Theatre in the Eighteenth Century, Together with the Day Book of the Same Period* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 55–62; and Joseph N. Ireland, *Records of the New York Stage from 1750–1860* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966), 1:168. Ireland gives a brief account of Chalmers' time in Philadelphia and New York.

41. *Gazette of the United States*, June 14, 1794.

42. *Gazette of the United States*, June 14, 1794. Again, I thank Alec Dun for drawing my attention to this quotation.

43. Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 7. Gilman suggests that perception of Jews by non-Jews had a significant and negative impact on how Jews perceived themselves. Also see Davida Bloom, "White, but Not Quite: The Jewish Character and Anti-Semitism—Negotiating a Location in the Gray Zone Between Other and Not," *Journal of Religion and Theatre* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2002), <http://www.athe.org/associations/12588/files/bloom.pdf>

44. For more on how Jews were othered in the late eighteenth century, see Borden, *Jews, Turks, and Infidels*.

45. Susanna Haswell Rowson, *Slaves in Algiers; Or, a Struggle for Freedom*, in *Plays by Early American Women, 1775–1850*, ed. Amelia Howe Kritzer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 56.

46. Rowson, *Slaves in Algiers*, 86.

47. See Borden, *Jews, Turks, and Infidels*, 11; Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation*, chap. 3; and Jeffrey H. Richards, *Drama, Theatre, and Identity in the New American Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chap. 7.

48. Royall Tyler alludes to this practice in *The Contrast* when Colonel Manly notes that he has come to New York to help secure payment for his soldiers. Many of those involved in wartime finances were accused of making money out of the crisis.

49. Rowson, *Slaves in Algiers*, quoted in Harap, *The Image of the Jew*, 206.

50. Between 1787 and 1799, there were literally hundreds of performances of Jewish characters on the national stage. Little information has survived about these performances with regard to their accurate or inaccurate representations of Jewish culture. Many, like *School for Scandal*, were so familiar to American audiences that few newspapers troubled to review them regularly, much less comment on minor characters such as Moses the moneylender. Other popular plays with minor Jewish characters included *The Devil Upon Two Sticks*, *The Little Hunchback*, and *The Young Quaker*. For an extended list, see Colman, "Plays of Jewish Interest on the American Stage."

51. Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*. Also see Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). Schappes's *A Documentary History of the Jews* contains a fascinating sermon, preached in Concord, New Hampshire, in 1788, titled "The Republic of the Israelites as an Example to the American States." The author, Samuel Langdon, chronicles the rise and fall of what he describes as a republican state under Moses after the flight from Egypt.

52. While most critics applauded the play's spirit of religious tolerance, some decried its exaggerated style and improbable plot twists. An 1809 essay in *The Ordeal: A Critical Journal of Politics and Literature*, for example, claimed that the play demonstrated "a considerable difference between the national taste of Germany and this country" ("INTRODUCTION TO POETRY," *The Ordeal; a Critical Journal of Politics and Literature*, January 7, 1809, 7). Dismissing Lessing's work as overwrought and perhaps naïve, the critic pointed to Schiller and Kotzebue as authors more congenial to American audiences. *Nathan the Wise* does not seem to have debuted on the American stage until 1860, when an advertisement for a German version at the New Yorker Stadt Theatre appeared in the *New York Herald* on November 17, 1860.

53. Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation*, 93.

54. See Ragussis's discussion of the emergence of British capitalism and the debates over Britain's "Jew Bill." According to Ragussis, the Jew became—simultaneously—a figure representing the negative aspects of British commerce and a redemptive figure who could rescue the nation from its mercantile obsessions. See Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation*, chap. 3.

55. Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation*, 91–94.

56. Pencak argues that the allusion to the "broker" helps to identify one of the central figures as Israel for Philadelphia audiences who would also (presumably) have recognized the popular politician. See Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles*, 223.

57. Harap, *The Image of the Jew*, 21.

58. Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles*, 240. Letters to *The Argus* protested Rivington's characterization of Jewish figures, noting that he impugned a community (Jews) who had generally displayed a stronger loyalty to the country than he had. The rebuttal alluded to Rivington's Tory leanings during the Revolution. See Harap, *The Image of the Jew*, 22.

59. Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles*, 240. Also see *The Argus*, December 17, 1795.

60. As I noted earlier, part of the schism between Jews and Federalists (who had, after all, been similarly victimized by the radical wartime regime in Pennsylvania) erupted in the wake of the French Revolution, which "granted Jews full civic and political equality," something that American Federalists were unwilling to do. For a full discussion, see Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles*, and Borden, *Jews, Turks, and Infidels*. Federalist sympathizer James Rivington launched an attack on Jewish Americans in 1795 New York, labeling the Democratic Party as part of the "See of Sedition and Murder at Paris." See Harap, *The Image of the Jew*, 21.

61. Richard Cumberland, *The Jew, or the Benevolent Hebrew* (Boston: John West, 1795), 40.

62. *Aurora*, February 16, 1795. The prologue to the British edition of the play claimed that "A virtuous miser is as much a wonder in the production of a dramatist as a virtuous Jew, and Mr. Cumberland has, in one single part, rescued two unpopular characters from the stigma under which they both innocently suffered" (Richard Cumberland, *The Jew, or The Benevolent Hebrew* (1794; repr., Frankfurt: Minerva GMBH, 1969), 4). *The Jew* debuted on the Philadelphia stage on February 11, 1795. As M. J. Landa notes in his study, *The Jew in Drama*, "A matter that has never been cleared up is the attitude of the Jews at the time of the original production. In his *Memoirs* Cumberland complains that the Jews had not expressed their gratitude by presenting him with some token, however slight that he might have handed down to his children. He even asserts that not a word, in speech or writing, did he receive by way of thanks from any Jew" (M. J. Landa, *The Jew in Drama* [Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1968], 139).

63. One of the toasts offered by the Tammany Society in 1798 (printed in *Aurora* on May 13, 1798) included the following wish (or pledge): "The Rights of Conscience—May political tenets never be fulminated from the pulpit, nor religious opinions enforced by the sword of the law."

64. For another perspective on the way in which Sheva represented the "Jew-not-Jew" for American spectators, see Eve Tavor Bannet, "Cumberland's Benevolent Hebrew in Eighteenth-Century Britain and America," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 33, no. 1 (2014): 84–106.

65. *Aurora*, February 16, 1795.

66. Cited in Colman, "Plays of Jewish Interest on the American Stage," 183.

67. Lee M. Friedman, *Jewish Pioneers and Patriots*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1942), 161.

68. The 1794 Jay Treaty represented an attempt to secure American trade rights, among other points. Jeffersonian Democrats opposed it as a renewal of ties with Britain.

69. William Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles*, 238.

70. Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles*, 241.

71. An obvious parallel exists with the numerous descriptors used for African-descended peoples in the United States.

72. I have noted earlier that relatively little information concerning afterpieces survives in the theatrical record. *The Jew and Doctor* is an exception and there is a clearer record of its last-minute emergence on the Philadelphia stage in December of 1799.

73. See John Bernard, *Retrospections of America, 1797–1811* (T. D. Clark, 1880).

74. Thomas Dibdin, *The Jew and Doctor* (New York: D. Longworth, 1807).

75. Dibdin, *The Jew and Doctor*.

76. Perceptions of these more philo-Jewish characters were not uniformly positive. For example, Sir Walter Scott observed some years later, “Few of the better class of the Jewish persuasion would, we believe, be disposed to admit either Abrahams or Sheva as fitting representatives of their tribe.” Quoted in Landa, *The Jew in Drama*, 141.

77. Geddeh Smith, *Thomas Abthorpe Cooper: America’s Premier Tragedian* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), 26.

78. In London Cooper played supporting roles in *Merchant*. He graduated to the role of Shylock in the United States. See Smith, *Thomas Abthorpe Cooper*, 16–28.

79. *Mercantile Advertiser* (New York).

80. *The Gazette* attacked Citizen N— (Nones) as “a Jew, a Republican, and poor.” Benjamin Nones, “Letter to the Editor of the Printer of the Gazette of the United States, with a covering note to Mr. William Duane, editor of the *Philadelphia Aurora*, August 11, 1800,” cited in Schappes, *A Documentary History of the Jews*, 94–95.

81. Susanne Ketchum Sherman, *Comedies Useful: Southern Theatre History, 1775–1812*, ed. Lucy B. Pilkinton (Williamsburg, VA: Celest Press, 1998), 219–20.

82. *Massachusetts Spy*, March 7, 1804. Quoted in Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles*, 130.

83. Advertisement quoted in Eola Willis, *The Charleston Stage in the XVIII Century* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1824), 137. Willis chronicles only one other production of *Merchant* on the Charleston stage. Susanne K. Sherman’s *Comedies Useful* does not mention any productions of *Merchant*.

84. Fifty-five percent of Charleston’s Jews lived on King Street in 1809. See Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles*, 139. While King Street has since become a site of fashionable shops and restaurants, I chanced to overhear a city tour during a 2012 research trip to Charleston in which the guide pointed out King Street as the former residence of many of the city’s Jews.

85. Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles*, 130.

86. Thomas J. Tobias, *The Hebrew Orphan Society of Charleston, SC, Founded 1801—An Historical Sketch* (Charleston, SC: Hebrew Orphan Society, 1957), 2. Held in the Special Collections of the College of Charleston.

87. See chapter 5 (“Into the Hands of the People”) in Heather S. Nathans, *Early American Theatre from the Revolution to Thomas Jefferson: Into the Hands of the People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

88. William Pencak, “Israel Israel (who was not Jewish), Anti-Semitism, and Partisan Politics in 1790s Philadelphia,” paper, presented to the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic (2002), 9–11.

89. Dibdin, *The Jew and Doctor*, 33.

90. Mordecai Noah from *The National Advocate*, quoted in Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981), 43.



91. Mordecai Noah from *The National Advocate*, quoted in Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 43–44.
92. For more biographical information on Noah, see Sarna's foundational study, *Jacksonian Jew*.
93. James Monroe to Mordecai Noah, April 25, 1815, in Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 26.
94. Mordecai Noah to Moses Manassah Noah, September 5, 1820, Simon Gratz Collection, case 6, box 33, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
95. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 30.
96. Bial, *Acting Jewish*, 16.
97. Bial, *Acting Jewish*, 17.
98. *The New-York Mirror: a Weekly Gazette of Literature and the Fine Arts*, May 14, 1825.
99. Harlan Douglas Whatley, Duncan A. Bruce, Randall Lenox Taylor, *Two Hundred Fifty Years: The History of Saint Andrew's Society of the State of New York, 1756–2006* (New York: Saint Andrew's Society of New York, 2008).
100. George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, vol. 2, 1798–1821 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), North American Theatre Online. Also see Lucile Gafford, "The Boston Stage and the War of 1812," *The New England Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (June 1934). Like Noah's script, Pilon's play involves disguises and switched identities, as well as a young heroine who refuses marriage to her father's chosen match.
101. Numerous scholars have explored the connections between Jewish Americans and Native Americans, including the suggestion that the Native Americans may have been the lost "10th Tribe" of Israel. Noah himself wrote on this topic. Many early American Jewish traders interacted with native populations. See Rachel Rubenstein, *Members of the Tribe: Native America in the Jewish Imagination* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010). Also see Aaron Baroway, "Solomon Etting, 1764–1847," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 15 (March 1920): 1–20. Baroway describes Etting's father-in-law's interactions with various native populations during the colonial period.
102. Craig Kleinman, "Pigging the Nation: Staging the Jew in M. M. Noah's *She Would Be a Soldier*," *ATQ* 10, no. 3 (September 1996).
103. Noah, *She Would Be a Soldier*, quoted in Rubenstein, *Members of the Tribe*, 29.
104. Rubenstein, *Members of the Tribe*, 30.
105. Aaron Phillips came from an established Jewish family in Philadelphia. Throughout his career he served as an actor, stage manager, and theatre manager. I discuss his career in subsequent chapters.
106. M. M. Noah, *She Would Be a Soldier, or the Plains of Chippewa* (New York: Longworth, 1819). Other actors across the country played the role of Jasper after the play's debut, and it is not possible to ascertain the conditions of production for each of those subsequent performances. Phillips continued to appear as Jasper into the 1830s, according to the production records of the period found in Odell's *Annals of the New York Stage*, and the play's implicit association with Noah's Jewish heritage also persisted well into the 1830s, as suggested by the comparisons made between the patriotic message of *She Would Be a Soldier* and Jewish playwright George Washington Harby's *Tutoona, or the Indian Girl*.
107. Joseph Darmstadt of Richmond, Virginia, offers an excellent example of just such a type. Darmstadt was a Jewish Hessian soldier who fought in the American Revolution, was captured and imprisoned, and elected to remain in the United States after the war. He later became one of the shareholders of the first postwar Richmond theatre. I discuss Darmstadt further in chapters 3 and 6. For a review of the Boston productions that discuss the farcical aspects of several of the characters, see "Theatre," *Ladies Port Folio* 1, no. 2 (January 8, 1820): 10.



108. Aaron Phillips frequently played fatherly roles, so this would not have been an unusual part for him. What strikes me is the *potential* for a layered reading by audiences familiar with Phillips's history and his connection to Noah.

109. Jasper might even recall to audiences figures such as Benjamin Nones, the French-born Revolutionary War hero.

110. Noah had a close relationship with the Park Theatre and often wrote parts for specific actors associated with the company, including his uncle. Subsequent productions of the play performed outside New York continued to highlight its patriotic content. For example, an 1832 New Orleans production incorporated a local militia troupe as described in "Morals of New Orleans," *New York Evangelist* 2, no. 44 (January 28, 1832): 383.

111. For more on Noah and the theatre see Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 48; and A. B. Makover, *Mordecai M. Noah, His Life and Work from the Jewish Viewpoint* (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1917).

112. For a list of some of the adaptations and versions of the Barbary captive narratives, see the back matter in Arthur Hobson Quinn, *A History of the American Drama: From the Beginning to the Civil War*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1943).

113. British-born actor John Barnes originated the role of Hassan. Barnes was well-known for his comic roles, though he does not seem to have specialized in any particular ethnic types as some actors did. For more on Barnes' career, see Ireland, *Records of the New York Stage*.

114. *New-York Gazette*, May 26, 1820. Numerous papers noted that real American "tars" had been part of the cast of the production and several newspapers claimed that the sailors "segars" had caused the fire that engulfed the Park Theatre on the third night of Noah's show.

115. "Yusef Caramalli," *The New-York Literary Journal, and Belles-Lettres Repository* 3, no. 2 (June 5, 1820): 140.

116. "The Drama," *The New-York Literary Journal, and Belles-Lettres Repository* 3, no. 1 (May 15, 1820): 70. This same issue also compares three separate adaptations of *Ivanhoe*, which I discuss below.

117. *New-York Gazette*, May 15, 1820.

118. *Saturday Evening Post*, January 26, 1822.

119. "The Dramatic Authors of America," *The Dramatic Mirror, and Literary Companion, Devoted to the Stage and Fine Arts* 1, no. 7 (September 25, 1841): 50.

120. "The Drama," *The New-York Literary Journal, and Belles-Lettres Repository* 3, no. 1 (May 15, 1820): 70.

121. *The American*, June 16, 1820.

122. *The American*, June 19, 1820.

123. Henry Samuel Morais, *The Jews of Philadelphia: Their History from the Earliest Settlement to the Present Time* (Philadelphia: The Levytype Company, 1894), 373–76. Note that this same H. B. Phillips was serving as the manager of Ford's Theatre at the time of Lincoln's assassination.

124. "Miscellany," *New-England Galaxy and Masonic Magazine* 3, no. 127 (March 17, 1820): 91A.

125. *Federal Republican* (Baltimore) quoted in "Miscellany," *New-England Galaxy and Masonic Magazine* (1817–1820) 3, no. 127 (March 17, 1820): 91A. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/127901487?accountid=14696>

126. Quoted in Blau and Baron, eds., *The Jews of the United States*, 1:15–16.

127. There was only one Jewish family living in Baltimore at the time of the Revolution, and there were comparatively few Jewish families scattered in other towns across the state.

Jews had significantly less representation in Maryland than in other colonies such as South Carolina or Pennsylvania. For more statistics on the Jewish population of Baltimore, see the timeline compiled by the Jewish Museum of Maryland: “1657–1849,” Jewish Museum of Maryland at the Herbert Bearman Campus, <http://www.jewishmuseummd.org/timeline-1657-1849>, accessed August 16, 2014. Also see *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (originally compiled from 1901 to 1906 and recently published online at <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/>).

128. Blau and Baron, eds., *The Jews of the United States*, 1:33. The Maryland “Jew Bill,” as it became known, was far from the first or the only significant legal challenge Jewish Americans faced because of their religious beliefs. Several other state constitutions besides Maryland’s also contained language precluding Jewish participation, and some of those were not amended until after the Civil War (as in the case of North Carolina). For more on this, see Blau and Baron, eds., *The Jews of the United States*, 1:21–32.

129. “Legislature of Maryland,” *Niles’ Weekly Register* 15, no. 390 (February 20, 1819): 9. This article is fascinating since it includes the names of the representatives who voted for and against the passage of the bill in 1801 and 1804.

130. Blau and Baron, eds., *The Jews of the United States*, 1:33.

131. Blau and Baron, eds., *The Jews of the United States*, 1:35–36.

132. “Report of the Select Committee,” in Blau and Baron, eds., *The Jews of the United States*, 1:37. For the bill’s text, see “AN ACT—To expand to the sect of people professing the Jewish religion, the same rights and privileges that are enjoyed by Christians,” in Blau and Baron, eds., *The Jews of the United States*.

133. *Maryland Censor*, undated clipping, in Blau and Baron, eds., *The Jews of the United States*, 1:41. Also see a *Maryland Censor* article reprinted in “Religious Toleration—Jew Bill,” *New-England Galaxy and Masonic Magazine* 2, no. 72 (February 26, 1819): 80.

134. See also articles from *The Aurora* (Philadelphia), *The Freeman’s Journal* (Philadelphia), and *The Southern Patriot* (Charleston) in Blau and Baron, eds., *The Jews of the United States*, 1:41–43.

135. “Piracy,” *The Philadelphia Register and National Recorder* 1, no. 7 (February 13, 1819): 122. Note that the paper is reprinting excerpts of articles from numerous newspapers in response to the debate.

136. *The New-England Galaxy and United States Literary Advertiser* 6, no. 316 (October 31, 1823): 2.

137. For more information on the timeline of the bill’s passage and its aftermath see “1657–1849,” Jewish Museum of Maryland at the Herbert Bearman Campus, <http://www.jewishmuseummd.org/timeline-1657-1849>, accessed August 16, 2014.

## Chapter Two

1. For more on this repurposing of eighteenth-century drama, see Jason Shaffer, *Performing Patriotism: National Identity in the Colonial and Revolutionary Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). For nineteenth-century models of masculinity in drama, see Karl M. Kippola, *Acts of Manhood: The Performance of Masculinity on the American Stage, 1828–1865* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

2. Matthew Rebirthorn, *Pioneer Performances: Staging the Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 37.

3. I do not mean to suggest that Jews were the *only* Americans struggling to integrate

their religious heritage into their American identities. The history of religious tolerance vs. religious discrimination in New World is obviously one that dates to the first settlements in the Americas and had a substantial impact on the native populations as well.

4. Rebhorn, *Pioneer Performances*, 49.

5. Peter P. Reed, *Rogue Performances: Staging the Underclass in Early American Theatre Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 152–53.

6. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 78.

7. Cited in Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 78.

8. “City of New York. Mordecai M. Noah, of No. 57, Franklin-Street, being duly sworn . . .” 1828, *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog*, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661733/>, accessed August 19, 2014.

9. Quotations drawn from a transcript of the trial titled “A MOST CAPITAL TRIAL,” published in *The New—England Galaxy and United States Literary Advertiser*, July 18, 1828.

10. Karl Kippola has pointed out that the role of religious faith in the Minis-Stark Affair presents an intriguing puzzle, since the Gentile Stark impugned Minis as a “damned Jew,” but it is not clear from the rest of Stark’s recorded comments whether he was apostrophizing Minis as a non-Christian or as an ethnic “other.” I thank Karl for this astute observation.

11. Although some scholars have assumed that elite dueling in America was a consistent practice until both legal injunctions and increasing urbanization lessened its prevalence in the culture, historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown argues that dueling—particularly among the elite—exhibits a “discontinuous past of ups and downs,” ebbs and flows that were connected to political, economic, and social trends (such as the Nullification Crisis which almost precipitated an open confrontation between the South and the federal government). Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “Andrew Jackson’s Honor,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 1.

12. Copy of the diary of Richard D. Arnold of Savannah, GA, August 9–16, 1832, in the Manuscript Collection of the American Jewish Archives. The original is housed at Duke University. Hereafter “Arnold diary.”

13. From “The Stark-Minis Duel,” *American Jewish Archives* 7, no. 1 (January 1957): 74. Several excerpts from the Habersham and Arnold diaries are included in this essay (which presents three separate accounts of the quarrel between the two men).

14. Arnold diary.

15. In the context of a duel, this weapon might be construed as less masculine than pistols, though Stark was a leader of the local artillery company and may have been more proficient with a rifle. But that detail in itself (if true) would suggest a failure to master a more elite mode of combat. It is also intriguing that Stark habitually carried a “large Spanish knife” according to Arnold’s diary. This suggests a perpetual readiness for combat of a less refined nature. Minis, by contrast, did *not* generally go armed, according to Arnold. Thanks to Matthew Rebhorn for the observation about the knife and to Peter Reed for his insight on the connotations of the rifle versus the pistol in “gentlemanly” modes of combat.

16. Arnold diary.

17. Arnold diary.

18. The situation was exacerbated by Minis’s decision to leave town during part of the debacle, prompting speculation that he had run away from the quarrel.

19. Arnold diary.

20. Excerpt from the *Savannah Georgian* reprinted in *The Rhode Island Republican*, April 28, 1832. Minis’s friend Richard Arnold helped to oversee and approve the reports printed about the incidents.

21. Copy of the Diary of Robert Habersham, undated, 1832, American Jewish Archives.
22. Information on the Minis family history from the "The Minis Family," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (March 1917).
23. Wyatt-Brown, "Andrew Jackson's Honor," 1.
24. Wyatt-Brown, "Andrew Jackson's Honor," 2–3. Although dueling in America has often been associated with Southern or frontier culture, Wyatt-Brown provides a rich survey of sources that map the history of American dueling elsewhere throughout the continent and connect it to its European antecedents.
25. Wyatt-Brown, "Andrew Jackson's Honor," 15.
26. My thanks to Matthew Rebborn for his comments on this section of the chapter. I appreciate his insights into why Minis's performance may ultimately have failed to accomplish his goals of re-establishing the status quo.
27. I use avatar in both its classical sense as the embodiment of an idea and in its contemporary sense as the idealized "stand-in" for an author who is creating and manipulating a narrative.
28. *The Jewish Messenger* 21, no. 20 (May 24, 1867).
29. Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 462–64.
30. The song was performed on September 27, 1824, when Lafayette arrived in Philadelphia. See Jonas B. Phillips, *Zamira, a Dramatic Sketch, and Other Poems* (New York: G. A. C. Van Buren, 1835), 72.
31. Many of these stories had already been published in *The Saturday Evening Post*.
32. "Ode spoken by Mrs. Hamblin at the Bowery Theatre, November 25, 1830. On the occasion of the celebration of the French Revolution," in Phillips, *Zamira*, 85.
33. Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 462.
34. The original 1831 stage production of *The Evil Eye* featured an actor known as D. A. Sarzedas, who may have been Jewish, in the role of Alexis (a supporting character). Sarzedas performed in New York City and Boston and served occasionally as a prompter and later as a theatre manager in Cincinnati. He was also treasurer of the National Theatre at some point in his career. His wife, too, was a performer and she appears on playbills as "Mrs. D. A. Sarzedas." There were families by the name of Sarzedas in New York and Charleston throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For more on the Sarzedas genealogy, see Jeffrey S. Gurock, ed. *American Jewish History*, vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 1998).
35. The choice of a story about Greece may have been a symbolic as well as a popular one since the struggles of the Greek people to establish their freedom had drawn worldwide attention from politicians and artists alike. Indeed, in raising the call to action in support of the Jews of Damascus (who came under attack in 1840), one supporter harked back to the "precedent" of the Greek situation. See "Persecution of the Jews at Damascus and Rhodes," *Hartford Daily Courant*, June 11, 1840.
36. Harap, *The Image of the Jew*, 263.
37. Jonas B. Phillips, *Camillus, or The Self-Exiled Patriot* (New York: E. B. Clayton, 1833), 48.
38. Phillips, *Camillus*, 59.
39. *The Philadelphia Album and Ladies' Literary Portfolio*, February 16, 1833.
40. Diary of Joseph Sill, February 7, 1833, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Sill apparently did not like the play, though his description seems at odds with the critical response. It is possible that the "thin house" he notes below may have shaped his perception of the piece. The full diary entry is included below:

“This evening I went to the Arch St. Theatre to see the new Tragedy of ‘Camillus’ written by J.B. Phillips. Of course the chief plot of the play turns upon his self-banishment from Rome, and upon his succeeding triumphs; but the interest of the design is marred by the importance given to minor characters & events, and the language is poor & meager; in fact, there seems to be little poetry bestowed on any of the characters save ‘Camilla’. It went off poorly with a thin house.”

41. Phillips, *Camillus*.

42. *New York Mirror*, June 8, 1833; the *New York Evening Star*, excerpted in *Philadelphia Album and Ladies’ Literary Portfolio* 8, no. 5; February 1, 1834: 39.

43. I have already noted two popular late eighteenth-century examples, including *The Jew, or the Benevolent Hebrew* and *The Jew and Doctor*. *The Jewess, or The Council of Constance* is another popular nineteenth-century example.

44. “The Indian of the Falls Valley, or The Foundling Maid” was reprinted among a number of American newspapers.

45. “The Indian of the Falls Valley, or The Foundling Maid,” *Kentucky Gazette*, February 17, 1826.

46. Maria shares some similarities with Christine in *She Would Be a Soldier*. Both are motherless girls whose fathers/father figures are somehow outsiders, yet each girl becomes firmly identified with the land and the nation’s patriotic cause.

47. For examples of how the Native American was represented in nineteenth-century performances, see Jill Lepore’s *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Vintage, 1997); Rebhorn, *Pioneer Performances*; Rosemarie K. Bank’s *Theatre Culture in America, 1825–1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, reissue 2007) and Joshua David Bellin’s *Medicine Bundle: Indian Sacred Performance and American Literature, 1824–1932* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). And though it is not the central focus of the work, surrogation and the Native American character is discussed in Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 186–92.

48. Rebhorn, *Pioneer Performances*, 27.

49. Rubenstein, *Members of the Tribe*, 24–25. Rubenstein argues that the gradual eradication of the Native American population offers parallels with the assimilation of the antebellum Jewish population, suggesting that both presented models of ancient societies that had yielded or were in the process of yielding to the pressure of Western/Gentile “progress.”

50. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 135.

51. Rubenstein, *Members of the Tribe*, 28–29. Rubenstein suggests that the mouthpieces that Noah provides (particularly the Native American) effectively erase a potential Jewish presence: “Jews are rendered invisible in and by the play.”

52. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 136. I discuss the Ararat venture in chapter 3.

53. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 136.

54. Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 189.

55. John Howard Payne to General Edward Harden, March 22, 1836. Harden Family Papers, Special Collections, Duke University, Durham, NC. All subsequent quotations in this paragraph are taken from the letter.

56. Payne was in love with Haden’s daughter Mary. Payne and Noah were not the only pre–Civil War Jewish Americans to become interested in the nation’s indigenous peoples. As late as 1856, Solomon Nunes de Carvalho would author “Incidents of Travel and Adventure in the Far West,” in which he recounted his interactions with native peoples and the challenges of keeping kosher on the frontier. See Rubenstein, *Members of the Tribe*, 35.

57. For more on this topic see Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew*, vol. 3; Jaher, *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness*; Colman, "Plays of Jewish Interest on the American Stage"; and Harap, *The Image of the Jew*.

58. The photostat of the original play manuscript located in Jonas B. Phillips, Small Collections at the American Jewish Archives (the original manuscript is held by the Harvard Theatre Collection).

59. William Harrison Ainsworth, *Jack Sheppard, A Romance* (serialized in *Bentley's Miscellany*, 1839–40). Accessed online at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/16215>

60. George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, vol. 4, 1834–1843 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), North American Theatre Online. Phillips's production appeared before Ainsworth's story had finished being serialized. This was not unusual, however, as playwrights and producers often hastened to capitalize on popular stories before their competitors did so.

61. *Jack Sheppard* was a popular tale that endured well into the 1880s. Cast lists for various adaptations at the Bowery and other New York theatres include Mendez as a character. See, for example, the first chapter of George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, vol. 9, 1870–1875 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), North American Theatre Online.

62. Phillips's adaptation played out against a troubled domestic and international backdrop for Jewish Americans, particularly anxieties about violence both by and against Jews.

63. *Persecution of the Jews in the East—Containing the Proceedings of a Meeting held at the Synagogue Mikveh Israel, Philadelphia* (August 27, 1840) (Philadelphia: C. Sherman & Co. Printers, 1840), 8. This publication is held in the collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia. The list of tortures was excerpted from a letter from Reverend G. M. Peiritz in Jerusalem.

64. The Baltimore *Sun* published a vivid and horrifying account of the specific tortures inflicted on the suspects. For more information, see "REVOLTING CRUELTY Jews," *The Sun*, August 11, 1840.

65. There are numerous newspaper accounts of the Damascus Affair, as well as accounts of public meetings and calls on local and national officials to speak out. For examples, see "Persecution of the Jews at Damascus and Rhodes," *Hartford Daily Courant*, June 11, 1840; and "The Damascus Persecution," *The Sun* (Baltimore), September 7, 1840.

66. "The Meeting of the Israelites," *The Sun* (Baltimore), September 1, 1840.

67. *Persecution of the Jews in the East* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman & Co. Printers, 1840), 3–5. These accusations were also chronicled in this pamphlet (the proceedings of a meeting at Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia on August 27, 1840), and they were apparently levied by Christians in Constantinople.

68. Clipping in a scrapbook in the Jacob Ezekiel Manuscript Collection at the American Jewish Archives. Though the clipping is undated, the year 1840 is penciled on the text.

69. Leiser served as the hazzan of the Mikveh Israel temple in Philadelphia, wrote numerous books about Jewish history, and was a member of a number of Jewish charities and social organizations. He was also one of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites (created in 1859). By his death in 1868, he was famous as a champion of Jewish rights and of the Conservative branch of Judaism. See *Persecution of the Jews in the East*, 11.

70. *Persecution of the Jews in the East*, 16.

71. Quoted in *Persecution of the Jews in the East*, 9.

72. Quoted in *Persecution of the Jews in the East*, 9.

73. *Persecution of the Jews in the East*, 16.

74. The play was variously known as *A Dream of Fate*, *The Dream of Fate*, and *Sarah the*



*Jewess* (and sometimes a combination of these titles). It was based on a French novel and was originally translated in novel form before being adapted multiple times for the stage.

75. January 26, 1843.

76. Mrs. Phillips was also acting as the manager of the Olympic Theatre on Queen Street at the time.

77. *New York Herald*, May 1, 1848. *The Sun* (Baltimore), November 1, 1848. Tracing the production history of the play can be challenging, since, as I note above, there were many variations on the title. It should not be confused with the popular play *The Jewess*.

78. For a copy of the deed for the Jewish cemetery in New Orleans see Blau and Baron, eds., *The Jews of the United States*, 3:853–54.

79. Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans*, 52.

80. Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans*, 101.

81. Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans*, 147–90.

82. Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans*, 226–27.

83. See John S. Kendall, *The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theater* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 321–27. Also see, “THE LITTLE, ‘UN. Matters and Things in New Orleans,” *Spirit of the Times; A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage* 19, no. 10 (April 28, 1849): 115. This article notes that by 1849 the Histrionic Association was “rapidly growing in favor.”

84. “What Is Talked about,” *Literary World* 4, no. 105 (February 3, 1849): 107.

85. Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans*, 227.

86. *Charleston Mercury*, December 15, 1825.

87. The play was also known as *Tutoona, or the Battle of Saratoga*.

88. Nelle Smither, *A History of the English Theatre in New Orleans* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1944), 114. Also see Kendall, *The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theater*, 110.

89. Undated newspaper clippings attached to a manuscript copy of *Tutoona* from the Temple Shearith Israel Collection of Harby-related materials in the Special Collections at the College of Charleston.

90. *The New Orleans Bulletin* cited in *The Southern Patriot*, March 9, 1835.

91. Notices of Harby’s two marriages appear in the *Louisiana Advertiser* (November 11, 1828) and the *New Orleans Bee* (December 18, 1835) (to Marie Eulalie Pouillet), and marriage records of the St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans show Harby’s wedding to Eulalie. James Rees (possibly the same Rees who authored the *Dramatic Mirror*) was witness. For articles on Harby’s various works, see the *Dramatic Mirror and Literary Companion* 1, no. 5 (September 11, 1841). A review of *Tutoona* appeared in the *Louisiana Advertiser* (April 23, 1835). On March 18, 1838, the *Daily Picayune* ran an article on *Nick of the Woods* that was reprinted in *The Bee* on March 21, 1838. Additional reviews of *Nick of the Woods* can be found in the *Louisiana Courier* (March 18, 1838) and the *Daily Picayune* (March 20, 1838). For more on Harby see the Bertram Wallace Korn Collection at the American Jewish Archives.

92. By 1835 there were certainly other American playwrights to whom Harby could have been compared, particularly those writing dramas with Native American characters. While the comparison to Noah is not conclusive, I find it intriguing as a potentially subtle or even subconscious classing of Jewish authors together in the same categories.

93. Isaac Harby was a well-known reformer and advocate for Jewish rights, including their accurate representation in the drama. I discuss Isaac Harby’s career in more detail in chapter 3 and 6.

94. While it may be a coincidence, 1838 had brought a series of new statutes in states such



as Maryland prohibiting work on the Christian Sabbath (Sunday), a regulation that drew protest from Jewish Americans whose Sabbath was obviously celebrated on Saturday.

95. Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 459. Note that Marcus also mentions the inclusion of the *Merchant* scene as part of the benefit, though he does not discuss the seeming oddness of the choice. Also see material on Harby in Kendall, *The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theater*, 110, 113, 155–56.

96. Ironically, *Nick of the Woods* is about a character who *hates* Indians, which suggests that Harby may not have used native characters in the same way as some other Jewish American authors.

97. See the *Times-Picayune*, April 29 and May 9, 1838. Also see *The Spirit of the Times*, January 6, 1838. Also see Charles S. Watson, *The History of Southern Drama* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 53–54.

98. Isaac Harby, “The Merchant of Venice,” in *From the Miscellaneous Writings of the late Isaac Harby, esq.* (Charleston, SC: James S. Burges, 1829), 262.

99. See Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans*, 186. Also see the Bertram Wallace Korn Papers, Manuscript Collection 99, box 9, folder 27, and American Jewish Archives.

100. See Jonathan Sarna’s discussion of the degrees of assimilation and acculturation among antebellum American Jews in Jonathan D. Sarna, “The Spectrum of Jewish Leadership in Ante-Bellum America,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1982).

101. Jonathan D. Sarna, “The ‘Mythical Jew’ and the ‘Jew Next Door’ in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Anti-Semitism in Nineteenth-Century American History*, ed. David A. Gerber (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 63.

102. Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans*, 227. Interestingly, an 1850 essay titled “The Manhattaner in New Orleans” describes the Jewish peddlers that thronged around the docks in New Orleans (the author mentions Yankee peddlers as well), *The Literary World* 7, no. 189 (September 14, 1850): 206. Although it is a small incident, it suggests that outsiders like the traveler authoring the article took note of the city’s Jewish community in a way that long-term residents may have ceased to do. In another article in *The Independent*, the author, describing New Orleans’ beautiful new synagogue, noted proudly that there were no separate Jewish quarters in American cities (“Southern Religious Items,” *The Independent . . . Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 2, no. 82 (June 27, 1850): 107.

103. As I have suggested, it is not possible to trace a linear path from prejudice to acceptance, and while Harby’s public acquittal may have signaled some greater acceptance of Jewish male prerogative, I contrast this incident with the humiliation suffered by Edward Rosewater on August 16, 1859. Rosewater was a Bavarian Jewish immigrant who arrived in the United States in 1854 at the age of thirteen. In his diary, he recounts an argument with a man in Tennessee who was demanding that Rosewater refund him some money (Rosewater was working as a peddler at the time). According to Rosewater, the man “Says if I was a *White man* [emphasis added] he would whip me.” Rosewater’s would-be assailant suggests Rosewater is somehow unworthy of masculine combat. See the Diaries of Edward Rosewater, Rosewater Family Papers, Jacob Rader Marcus Center, at the American Jewish Archives.

104. Leon A. Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820–1870* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press and the University Press of New England, 1976), 170.

105. Hyman B. Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York, 1654–1860* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1945), 385.

106. Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue*, 170. Jick notes that larger efforts to create a

“Board of Delegates of American Israelites” drew fire from many Jewish American communities. Ultimately, as Jick observes, only 24 out of 208 congregations from across the United States were represented.

107. See the discussion of responses to the Mortara case in Bertram Wallace Korn, *Eventful Years and Experiences: Studies in Nineteenth Century American Jewish History* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1954).

108. Moos adds a rebellious nephew to the family named Jephthah; he has Edgardo (re-named Benjamin) lose his mother to grief early in the drama; and he ends the play with an armed uprising against the pope.

109. Moos, *Mortara*, 80.

110. “The Drama,” *The New-York Literary Journal*, and *Belles-Lettres Repository* 3, no. 1 (May 15, 1820): 70.

111. Moos, *Mortara*, 108.

112. Moos, *Mortara*, 126.

113. Of all the liberties Moos takes with the true story of Edgardo Mortara, these are the most obvious.

### Chapter Three

1. *The Hebrew talisman: reprinted verbatim from a copy of a rare pamphlet, date circa 1836* (London: published by the TPS, 1888), 4–5, [http://www.archive.org/stream/hebrewtalismanre00londiala\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/hebrewtalismanre00londiala_djvu.txt), accessed October 2, 2009.

2. Quoted in Theodore Rosengarten and Dale Rosengarten, *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press in association with McKissick Museum, 2002), 63.

3. Adam Mendelsohn, “Tongue Ties: The Emergence of the Anglophone Jewish Diaspora in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *American Jewish History* 93, no. 2 (June 2007): 177–209.

4. See Isaac Mayer Wise, “The Wandering Jew,” in *Selected Writings of Isaac M. Wise*, ed. David Philipson and Louis Grossmann (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke Company, 1900), 179–96, <http://books.google.com/books?id=U3FAAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover>; and Jonathan Sarna, “Port Jews in the Atlantic: Further Thoughts,” *Jewish History* 20 (June 2006): 217, quoted in Mendelsohn, “Tongue Ties,” 179. “Port Jews” or “Port Jewry” refers to a largely European and Atlantic phenomenon of the sixteenth through early nineteenth centuries involving networks of Jewish traders who facilitated shipping and market exchanges throughout the Dutch, English, Jamaican, and American circuits. For more on Port Jews, see Kagan and Morgan, *Atlantic Diasporas*.

5. Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, new edition 1999), 332.

6. Mendelsohn, “Tongue Ties,” 185. Kagan and Morgan also refer to the “complex webs of relationships” that characterized early Atlantic and Mediterranean Jewish networks in Kagan and Morgan, *Atlantic Diasporas*, viii.

7. For more on comic treatments of the Wandering Jew, see Harap, “American Journeys of the Wandering Jew,” 239–55. Isaac Mayer Wise describes Wandering Jews as bringing the benefit of their cosmopolitanism to non-Jewish communities as early as 600 BC. For example, he describes the contributions of Hebrew “cosmopolitan orators and writers” to Greek culture. See Wise, “The Wandering Jew,” 4.

8. Rosenthal, “Inventing the Other,” 173. For more on sentimental citizenship and the de-

velopment of American culture, see Andrew Burstein, *Sentimental Democracy: The Evolution of America's Romantic Self-image* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999); and Joseph Fichtelberg, *Critical Fictions: Sentiment and the American Market, 1780–1870* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

9. Kagan and Morgan, *Atlantic Diasporas*, viii; and Rosengarten and Rosengarten, *A Portion of the People*, 63.

10. While this succeeds with some characters (as in *The Beaux' Stratagem*), it backfires comically in the case of those foppish characters who are not able to apply the lessons of a cosmopolitan experience in the proper way (*The Country Wife*, *Man of Mode*, etc.).

11. The connection between cosmopolitan experience and sympathy preoccupied many eighteenth-century British and American dramatists. Typically, the more cosmopolitan the figure the *less* sympathetic that figure tended to be to the sufferings of others. Characters closer to nature with less experience of the world (such as Belcour in *The West Indian*) stand out for their compassionate nature, while fops, dandies, or flirts (such as Charlotte or Billy Dimple in *The Contrast*) have lost their innate sense of compassion by exposure to travel and urban culture. As Tyler notes, "Travelled [*sic*] gentlemen rise superior in their own opinion . . . but if the contempt which they contract for their own country is the most valuable acquisition of their travels, I am far from thinking their time and money well spent." See Royall Tyler, *The Contrast*, in *Early American Drama*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards, 1–57 (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 45.

12. The cosmopolitan Gentile character (even the fop) generally envisions bringing his expanded experience of the world *back* to his native heath. The degree of contrast between the cosmopolitan traveler and the others who have remained behind gives added value to his travels.

13. Amir Eshel, "Cosmopolitanism and Searching for the Sacred Space in Jewish American Literature," *Jewish Social Studies* 9, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2003): 122.

14. Eshel, "Cosmopolitanism," 124–25.

15. My thanks to Aaron Tobiason for his suggestions regarding the application of Eshel's argument.

16. Note that a "Jew by Profession" means that David openly "professed" his Jewish faith, not that he was a "professional Jew."

17. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 5, 1763.

18. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 21, 1776.

19. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 29, 1775.

20. Nathans, "A Much Maligned People," 310–11.

21. This anxiety would peak in the mid-nineteenth century as the "confidence man" emerged as a leading character in American fiction and drama. For more on the history of the confidence man in American culture, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

22. *Four Comedies by Charles Macklin*, ed. J. O. Bartley (Hamden: Anchor Books, 1968), 43, quoted in Matthew Biberman, *Masculinity, Anti-Semitism, and Early Modern English Literature: From the Satanic to the Effeminate Jew* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 153.

23. The character is discussed in Biberman, *Masculinity, Anti-Semitism, and Early Modern English Literature*, 154.

24. The popularity of this play persisted into the early decades of the nineteenth century.

For example, see the July 13, 1812, playbill for the Providence, Rhode Island, production housed in the Miscellaneous Collection of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

25. That same spring it appeared as part of the New York season with Mr. Martin and Mr. Williamson in the roles of Atall and Marall, and by 1799 it had reached Charleston with Mr. Chambers as Atall and Mr. Prigmore as Marall. *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, December 7, 1799.

26. Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation*, 130–31.

27. Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation*, 131.

28. Andrew Franklin, *The Wandering Jew, or Love's Masquerade*, (Gale ECCO, Print Editions, 2010), 45.

29. Franklin, *The Wandering Jew*, 47.

30. Franklin, *The Wandering Jew*, 47.

31. At an earlier point in the play, Atall disguised himself as an Italian.

32. The benefit was advertised in *Porcupine's Gazette*, April 6, 1798.

33. William Dunlap, *A History of the American Theatre from Its Origins to 1832*, ed. Tice L. Miller (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 124.

34. Harwood also appeared in Dunlap's now-lost play *Bonaparte in England*, in which he portrayed "a German Jew broker, who being shipwrecked on the coast of England, is taken up as Jerome Bonaparte, for whom the English government were keeping watch, and the honours paid to Shadrach, by an Irish officer, who confounds Jerome with Napoleon, and insists upon treating the broker as First Consul or Emperor, constitute the fun of the farce." See George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, vol. 2, 1798–1821 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), 191.

35. Harwood eventually married Benjamin Franklin's granddaughter, perhaps the ultimate indication of "insider" status.

36. Mr. Solomon's name frequently appears in cast lists and theatre chronicles with the spelling "Solomons." The reference is clearly to the same individual. I have opted to spell it as Solomon throughout the chapter.

37. See Mordecai Manuel Noah, *A Literary Autobiography of Mordecai Manuel Noah* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Historical Society, 1897), 113.

38. Noah, *A Literary Autobiography*, 113.

39. Dunlap's diaries suggest that like many Gentile Americans he found socializing with Jews a noteworthy experience (given their comparative scarcity even in populous cities such as New York). He recalls a dinner on February 28, 1820, in Norfolk, Virginia, with the Myers family, observing: "They are jews [sic], well informed, genteel & uncommonly handsome in the younger part of the family." *Diary of William Dunlap (1766–1839): The Memoirs of a Dramatist, Theatrical Manager, Painter, Critic, Novelist, and Historian* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1930), 2.

40. There is every reason to imagine he was native-born, based on the little information that survives about him and based on the fact that few managers would go to the expense of bringing an actor like Solomon (who played mostly minor roles) all the way from England.

41. See Kalman A. Burnim, "The Jewish Presence in the London Theatre, 1660–1800," *Jewish Historical Studies* 33 (1992–1994).

42. Actors often used a London origin as a selling point in establishing their bona fides with American audiences, so had the Solomons been from England, it is likely they would have tried to use this to their advantage. The presence of the Solomon family name in southern cities such as Charleston or Savannah offers no guarantee of the Solomon family's origin, since some early

settlers lived outside the more concentrated Jewish American communities. Given the family's chosen profession, however, it seems likely that they would have been near, if not actually in, a city that hosted theatrical entertainments. It is also possible that the Solomon family hailed from Virginia, as there were some Jewish settlers in the Richmond and Alexandria regions, though those communities were smaller than the ones in South Carolina and Georgia.

43. Wartime theatrical bans were still in effect in many states, and the return of theatre companies boasting British actors and British plays proved unpopular among many communities still smarting from wartime privations. This was particularly true in South Carolina, which had incurred substantial debt during the war. For more on Charleston theatre history during this period see Eola Willis, *The Charleston Stage in the XVIII Century* (New York: Benjamin Blom, reissued 1968).

44. Sonneck's *Early Opera in America* describes Mrs. Solomon as "a favorite Southern actress." O. G. Sonneck, *Early Opera in America* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1915), 152.

45. The membership list of the "Jew Company" is dated June 7, 1821. It may be found in the Cohen Family Papers, box 1, American Jewish Historical Society.

46. Had Solomon been a Charleston native, however, his fellow citizens would likely have claimed him in the various theatrical advertisements and reviews surrounding his 1785 appearance. Another possibility is that Solomon had begun as a local amateur and transitioned to professional status.

47. Additional discussion concerning Mr. Solomon appears in my essay "Is There Too Much History in My Theatre History?" in *Theater Historiography: Critical Interventions*, ed. Henry Bial and Scott Magelssen (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

48. *Charleston Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, September 13, 1786.

49. Ryan had begun his career as a prompter in New York in 1773. By the mid-1780s, he had joined forces with actor Thomas Wall to create a theatre company in Baltimore. See Odai Johnson, *Absence and Memory in Colonial American Theatre: Fiorelli's Plaster* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 239–40.

50. The role was likely that of Leander, the young lover, in *The Padlock*, a popular afterpiece on the early American stage.

51. Letter from Mr. J. Heard to Dennis Ryan, November 23, 1785, Theatre Papers of Dennis Ryan, Maryland Historical Society. Thanks to Odai Johnson for his suggestion to review this collection.

52. Solomon disappears from the historical record in the early 1800s, after which I can find no further accounts of his stage roles. Other members of his family continued to perform well into the first decade of the nineteenth century. It is not clear whether Solomon died or simply retired from the stage. If the latter, it is not clear where he settled after his retirement. I have not been able to find him in local directories in any of the major cities where he had performed.

53. According to Sonneck, between 1791 and 1792 the Solomon family had been trying to introduce opera to New London, Connecticut, with little success, although local newspapers record at least five performances between November and January of that period. See Sonneck, *Early American Opera*, 152.

54. Charles Blake, *An Historical Account of the Providence Stage* (Providence: George H. Whitney, 1868), 46.

55. Solomon later attempted yet another independent venture at the temporary Cedar Street Theatre in Philadelphia, where he and his wife staged comic operas as well as patriotic songs and patriotic prologues written by citizens of Philadelphia.

56. Blake, *An Historical Account*, 18. There were multiple examples of Jewish stockholders in the early American theatre and of Jewish American citizens socializing with performers (Jewish or Gentile). In an unusual example of a Jewish American woman socializing with a *female* playwright, the Cohen family papers contain two undated letters from playwright Ann Julia Hatton (who penned a pro-Tammany play in 1794) to one of the Miss Cohens. Hatton's letters solicit Cohen's presence at afternoon tea, and also discuss Hatton's latest work. See the Cohen Family of Richmond and Baltimore, Papers 1779–1897, American Jewish Historical Society.

57. Sonneck, *Early Opera in America*, 163.

58. Harper's challenges with the theatre are also detailed in the Jeremiah Olney Papers, box 1, folder 11, Rhode Island Historical Society. During the time that Harper was trying to open the theatre, there were renewed attacks against the playhouse among local politicians.

59. *Ibid.*, May 5, 1794, Newport.

60. An undated draft of a letter, signed simply "An Old Soldier," refers to a "regular siege" mounted by antitheatricalists against the opening of the postwar playhouses in Rhode Island. See Jeremiah Olney Papers, box 1, folder 11, Rhode Island Historical Society. The Solomons' travels took them across New England, both back north to Providence, as well as further west to Salem. They appeared in Rhode Island later that summer with the Kenna Company as part of a benefit for Americans captured in Algiers.

61. This company was a rival for the one in residence at the newly opened Chestnut Street Theatre. The Solomons had played with various members of the Southwark company in other cities.

62. Alexander Reinagle, one of the managers of the Chestnut Street Theatre Company, was also a Mason. See Poulson-Durang Theatre History Scrapbooks, chapter 14, p. 31, Library Company of Philadelphia Collection.

63. Johnson, *Absence and Memory*, 114.

64. Poulson-Durang Theatre History Scrapbooks, chap. 24, p. 41, Library Company Collection. Durang describes "Mrs. Solomons [*sic*]" as a "comic singer" and an "old member of the company" (the latter suggests some previous association with members of the Southwark troupe, though Durang does not cite his sources).

65. For example, Jonas Phillips (grandfather of Jonas B. Phillips) became a Mason in New York City in 1760, one year after becoming an American citizen; his descendant, Isaac Phillips, was the Grand Master of Lodge #107 (the Albion Lodge); Richmond's Jacob Cohen and Joseph Darmstadt were Masons; as was Boston's Moses Michael Hays (inducted 1782, appointed Grand Master 1792). These are just a scant handful of the prominent Jewish Americans who participated in the Masons between the mid-1700s and the mid-1800s. See the Phillips Family Papers, American Jewish Historical Society; and the Cohen Family Papers (Richmond and Baltimore), Jacob Rader Marcus Center, American Jewish Archives. Information on Hays's involvement with the Masons may be found in the archives of the Grand Masonic Lodge of Massachusetts (Boston, MA).

66. Myron Berman, *Richmond's Jewry, 1769–1976: Shabbat in Shockoe* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979). See Berman's discussion of Joseph Darmstadt, a local Masonic leader. As I mention above, Darmstadt was also one of the founders of the postwar Richmond theatre.

67. Odai Johnson discusses the ways many eighteenth-century actors successfully used their Masonic connections. See Johnson, *Absence and Memory*, chap. 4.

68. If Mr. Solomon rented rooms in a larger establishment, his name might not appear in a directory. I have located the appearance of an actor named "Mr. Solomon" in the English The-



atre of New Orleans, but he is listed for one night only in 1835 and does not appear before or after that date. See John S. Kendall, *The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theater* (1952; repr., New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).

69. John Williams Walker to Larkin Newby, August 20, 1799, Larkin Newby Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

70. John Williams Walker to Larkin Newby, September 2, 1803, Larkin Newby Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

71. John Howard Payne to General Edward Harden, December 5, 1835, Harden Family Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC. In the letter Payne describes his conflict with the Georgia government over its treatment of Native peoples (a conflict that prompted officials to promise to arrest him if he returned to the state). Hence his comment that he will “go to the border and look in.”

72. Gabriel Harrison, *John Howard Payne, Dramatist, Poet, Actor, and Author of Home Sweet Home! His Life and Writings* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1885), 247.

73. For an interesting interpretation of Payne’s significance for American audiences, see Bruce McConachie, “Paradigms for Writing a National Theatre History,” *New England Theatre Journal* (1997): 29–43. Additionally, Joseph Sill’s diary records an account of one of the benefit performances staged upon Payne’s return to America after his prolonged sojourn overseas: “December 1, 1832: John Howard Payne, who has just returned from England, where he has been for the last 20 years, had a public benefit given him at the Park Theatre in N. York on the 29th [word illegible], at which the most celebrated English and native performers play’d gratuitously, vizt. Kemble & his Daughter, Wallack, Cooper, Forrest, &c, &c. The pit was altered for the accommodation of ladies, & the Theatre fill’d at the admission price of \$5 each, & \$1 for the Gallery—it netted him about \$5000, an exceedingly well-timed bequest, as he returned poor in this World’s Goods. The Benefit was honorable alike to him & to his countrymen! The pieces performed were of his own writing, vizt. Brutus, Charles 2nd, & Claire.” Joseph Sill Diary, vol. 1, 1831–1836, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

74. He obviously had *some* connection to his Jewish heritage if he claimed to recognize synagogue rituals.

75. Harrison, *John Howard Payne*, 13.

76. Harrison, *John Howard Payne*, 216. Also see Rosa Pendleton Chiles, “John Howard Payne: American Poet, Actor, Playwright, Consul and the Author of ‘Home, Sweet Home,’” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* 31/32 (1930).

77. Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 1:535.

78. For more on this family’s history, see Emily Bingham, *Mordecai: An Early American Family* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).

79. By marriage the Mordecais were linked to many of Richmond’s most powerful Jewish families, as well as those in Boston (including Boston theatre shareholder and Masonic leader Moses Michael Hays). See Berman, *Richmond’s Jewry*, 64–66.

80. Judith Mordecai to Myer Myers, December 19, 1791, Mordecai Family Papers #847, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

81. Mordecai’s Richmond history places many of the city’s Jewish citizens squarely among the community’s social and cultural organizations. See Samuel Mordecai, *Richmond in By-Gone Days, Being the Reminiscences of an Old Citizen* (1856; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1975), 177–91. Joseph Marx, one of Samuel Mordecai’s uncles, was chosen to be part of the committee “to erect a monument to the memory of the victims of the 1811 [Richmond The-



atire] fire.” Berman, *Richmond’s Jewry*, 72. Mordecai himself was a witness to the fire. This is discussed further in chapter 6.

82. Samuel Mordecai to Rachel Mordecai, January 15, 1810, Jacob Mordecai Papers, box 1, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC. Samuel’s letter about Payne also highlights his acquaintance with the prominent women of Richmond society.

83. See letters from 1800 to 1811 between Samuel, Ellen, and Rachel Mordecai, particularly September 6, 1800; November 24, 1806; December 26, 1806; and July 3, 1808, in the Mordecai Family Papers #847, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

84. Rachel Mordecai to Ellen Mordecai, July 6, 1810, Jacob Mordecai Papers, box 1, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

85. See Samuel Mordecai to Rachel Mordecai, August 15, 1810; August 30, 1810; September 21, 1810; and November 2, 1811, Jacob Mordecai Papers, box 1, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

86. Quoted in Berman, *Richmond’s Jewry*, 65.

87. Berman, *Richmond’s Jewry*, 65.

88. Berman, *Richmond’s Jewry*, 74. Jacobs complains about the absence of any kind of entertainments except the city’s museum, but he concludes that while Richmond’s inhabitants are “less refined,” he prefers them to those of more dynamic cities.

89. Mordecai, *Richmond in By-Gone Days*, 136, 152. Mordecai finds it ironic that the failed site of the academy was taken over by a company of traveling performers.

90. The witness noted that “when he got to Charleston he would have many friends of his religion there who, he thought, would assume the loan.” See the published transcript of Noah’s trial housed at the Library Company of Philadelphia.

91. For information on the society’s mission and progress, see “Minutes of the Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews,” New-York Historical Society; John Henry Livingston to Peter Wilson, July 24, 1823, Milledoller Papers, New-York Historical Society. For more on the society’s impact on early nineteenth-century American Jewish life, see Blau and Baron, eds., *The Jews of the United States*, 3:711–35.

92. The author writes, “In this country, innumerable proofs are to be found of patriotism, of talent, and of virtue among the Jews, who, in every state where they are not disqualified through the existence of religious tests, have obtained a high reputation for probity and devotion to the public cause.” *Israel Vindicated: Being a Refutation of the Calumnies Propagated respecting the Jewish Nation: in which the objects and views of the American Society for Ameliorating the Condition of the Jews are investigated. By an Israelite* (New York: Abraham Collins, 1820), v–viii. For another example of the popularity of Jewish conversion narratives that the author is protesting, see Sarah Pogson Smith, *Zerah, the Believing Jew* (*Published in Aid of Laying the Cornerstone of Jesus’ Church, a Protestant Church in the Valley of the Mississippi*) (New York: Printed by the NY Protestant Episcopal Press, 1837); Charles J. Aldis, “Acknowledgments: Domestic Missions,” *Episcopal Recorder*, March 3, 1838, 196.

93. The Mordecais’ letters described a similar incident some thirteen years earlier involving a missionizing visitor who would not leave Jacob’s home, despite many polite requests.

94. Woloson notes that early nineteenth-century authors “frequently characterized pawn-broking as a profession well suited to the Jews . . . depicting them as bloodthirsty and rapacious profiteers.” Wendy A. Woloson, *In Hock: Pawning America from Independence through the Great Depression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 33.

95. Jonathan Sarna has described the middle decades of the nineteenth century as the “Heroic Age of the Jewish Peddler.” The Jewish peddler had long been a popular figure on the stage and in fiction, as plays from the middle of the eighteenth century well into the nineteenth century incorporated the Jewish peddler as a source of comedy. Increasingly, American periodicals introduced Jewish peddlers as the butts of jokes (recounting tales of them being forced to eat bacon, or fooled by other, more clever tricksters). Many Jewish immigrants, displaced from their homelands, initially took to peddling from necessity, but longed to establish more permanent businesses and become *part* of the landscape, rather than merely pass through it. Local communities often lodged complaints about peddlers. Newspapers were quick to publish reports of peddlers robbing innocent citizens, and they were sometimes targeted by hostile groups. As the journal *The Israelite* reported, Jewish travelers and peddlers often did their best to disguise their “Jewishness”: “Fearing . . . that when recognized as a Jew . . . in this is adopted country, he would excite the same prejudice and encounter the same ill treatment, it is not to be wondered at, that the humble Israelite thought it the best policy, not to run any risk at all?” *The Israelite* 1, no. 11 (September 22, 1854), vol. 1, no. 11: 85. Also see Maxwell Whiteman, “Notions, Dry Goods, and Clothing: An Introduction to the Study of the Cincinnati Peddler,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 53, no. 4 (April 1963): 311.

96. Woloson, *In Hock*, 39.

97. One of the Jewish figures in the cartoon bids farewell to “John Bull,” claiming, “We are all called away,” a comment that suggests that the cartoonist envisioned the Jewish money men as a collective.

98. *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate: A Monthly Periodical Devoted to the Diffusion of Knowledge of Jewish Literature and Religion* 7, no. 10 (January 1850): 511.

99. Mordecai Noah to Rebecca Noah, May 16, 1830, Mordecai Manuel Noah Papers, American Jewish Historical Society.

100. For more on this period in Phillips’s career, see James Dormon Jr., *Theater in the Antebellum South, 1815–1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967). Also see Nelle Smither, “A History of the English Theatre at New Orleans, 1808–1842,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 28 (1945): 85–276, 361–572.

101. For more on this complex family history, see the Phillips Family Papers at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives. The Phillips family network was quite extensive and included theatrical shareholders, newspaper editors, and a grand master among the New York Masonic community (Aaron’s nephew Isaac).

102. Aaron Phillips to the Federal Street Theatre proprietors, July 8, 1828, box 9, L 59, Boston (Federal Street) Theatre Collection, Boston Public Library.

103. Undated clipping, Poulson-Durang Theatre History Scrapbooks, 142, Library Company of Philadelphia. Durang notes that while the trip may not have been profitable, at least Phillips was able to make some money selling his horses when he returned from his travels.

104. Clipping dated January 10, 1858, Poulson-Durang Theatre History Scrapbooks, Library Company Collection.

105. Poulson-Durang Theatre History Scrapbooks, chap. 47, pp. 92–94, Poulson-Durang Theatre History Scrapbooks, Library Company of Philadelphia Collection.

106. Poulson-Durang Theatre History Scrapbooks, chap. 48, p. 48, Library Company of Philadelphia Collection. Durang notes, “Mr. M.S. Phillips having a very prominent aquiline nose, was known among the theatricals by the soubriquet of ‘Nosey’ Phillips.” According to Henry Pitt Phelps, Phillips was even listed as “Nosey” in *Scott’s Albany Directory* of 1828. See Henry Pitt Phelps, *Players of a Century: A Record of the Albany Stage* (Albany: Joseph Mc-

Donough, 1880), 120, [http://books.google.com/books?id=\\_9Q0AAAAMAAJ&pg=PA120&lpg=PA120&dq=moses+%22nosey%22+phillips&source=bl&ots=h15F96dtX&sig=YEKZewp2yDV9gjdjjCwpyyRWk5A&hl=en&sa=X&ei=anSwU4qSFafi8gGopoGoCg&ved=0CCYQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=moses%20%22nosey%22%20phillips&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=_9Q0AAAAMAAJ&pg=PA120&lpg=PA120&dq=moses+%22nosey%22+phillips&source=bl&ots=h15F96dtX&sig=YEKZewp2yDV9gjdjjCwpyyRWk5A&hl=en&sa=X&ei=anSwU4qSFafi8gGopoGoCg&ved=0CCYQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=moses%20%22nosey%22%20phillips&f=false)

107. Henry Dickinson Stone, *Personal Recollections of the Drama* (Albany, NY: Charles Van Benthuysen, 1873), 190, [http://books.google.com/books?id=Cjs\\_AAAAIAAJ&pg=PA188-&lpg=PA188&dq=moses+%22nosey%22+phillips&source=bl&ots=i7\\_i-JGBn5&sig=iN7q3-\\_dMZUro0lhIwLmba1e\\_Lk&hl=en&sa=X&ei=anSwU4qSFafi8gGopoGoCg&ved=0CCMQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=moses%20%22nosey%22%20phillips&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Cjs_AAAAIAAJ&pg=PA188-&lpg=PA188&dq=moses+%22nosey%22+phillips&source=bl&ots=i7_i-JGBn5&sig=iN7q3-_dMZUro0lhIwLmba1e_Lk&hl=en&sa=X&ei=anSwU4qSFafi8gGopoGoCg&ved=0CCMQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=moses%20%22nosey%22%20phillips&f=false)

108. Falconbridge (Jonathan Kelly), *Dan Marble: A Biographical Sketch of that Famous and Diverting Humorist* (New York: Dewitt and Davenport, 1851), 56. Note that I have included the names of the speakers to clarify who is who in the dialogue.

109. Poulson-Durang Theatre History Scrapbooks, chap. 45, p. 88, Library Company of Philadelphia Collection.

110. Poulson-Durang Theatre History Scrapbooks, chap. 45, p. 88, Library Company of Philadelphia Collection. This was not the only instance of Phillips's chicanery. While managing the Richmond Hill Theatre he advertised the same play under three separate titles to lure the audience back to the theatre night after night. In another episode in 1829 with the Providence Theatre, Phillips "made a disastrous dramatic speculation" and accumulated so many debts that he had to be smuggled out of town on a steamer to avoid arrest. Blake, *An Historical Account*, 182.

111. For more on Phillips as a comical character, see *The Daily Picayune* (Louisiana) August 24, 1862.

112. Joe Miller jokes refer to *Joe Miller's Jests*, first published in 1739. The collection boasts a selection of jokes about Jews (among other characters), including the tale of a Jew named Moses who was about to be hanged when he received a reprieve. Rather than quit the gallows, he waited to see the other two prisoners hanged. When asked why, he said he hoped to get a good price on their used clothes. See *Joe Miller's Complete Jest Book*, <https://archive.org/details/joemillerscomple00mill>

113. For a selection of these images see the digitized collections of the Folger Shakespeare Library: [http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/view/search;JSESSIONID=767851d0-e18d-4381-9521-bc91f209e81c?os=0&q=BIB\\_Subject%3D%22Shakespeare%2C+William%2C+1564-1616.+Merchant+of+Venice%2C+depicted.%22&pgs=250&res=2&cic=FOLGERCM1~6~6&sort=Call\\_Number%2CAuthor%2CCD\\_Title%2CImprint](http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/view/search;JSESSIONID=767851d0-e18d-4381-9521-bc91f209e81c?os=0&q=BIB_Subject%3D%22Shakespeare%2C+William%2C+1564-1616.+Merchant+of+Venice%2C+depicted.%22&pgs=250&res=2&cic=FOLGERCM1~6~6&sort=Call_Number%2CAuthor%2CCD_Title%2CImprint)

#### Chapter Four

1. Joseph Lyons, "The Diary," *American Jewish History* 91, no. 3–4 (September/December 2003): 528.

2. In his 1971 study *The Grandees: America's Sephardic Elite*, Stephen Birmingham describes a shift in attitude among some members of the American Sephardic community in the mid-nineteenth century, arguing that "They had integrated quietly into urban American life, and had become gentlefolk. For these people, their Jewishness was something to be kept privately in the background." See Stephen Birmingham, *The Grandees: America's Sephardic Elite* (1971; repr., Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 261.

3. Birmingham, *The Grandees*, 261.

4. Nor was this response unique to theatre artists. As I have noted previously, patriots

and politicians including Haym Salomon and Israel Israel received similar treatment from their political opponents, even when the issues at stake had nothing to do with religion or heritage.

5. Interestingly, Mordecai performed with Moses Phillips in New York in 1827 according to Ireland's *Record of the New York Stage*, 72.

6. See the announcement of William and Isabelle's "Farewell Benefit" in the *Literary Cadet and Rhode-Island Statesman* 3, no. 1 (April 16, 1828): 2. Isabelle Mordecai Dinneford's name appears in fewer records than William's (likely due to her husband's repeated stints as a theatre manager), though Ireland's *Record of the New York Stage* confirms that she was a good dancer. *The Records of the Columbia Historical Society* (vol. 5) note that she danced in the Washington, DC, theatre as part of the 1824 celebrations in honor of Lafayette's visit to the city. She also appeared with a handful of circus companies. In 1828 she announced her retirement from the stage, and an 1833 issue of the *Providence Patriot* mentions her work at Dinneford's Providence shop (see the *Providence Patriot* 1, no. 29 [July 20, 1833]: 3). On November 5, 1835, the *New York Evening Post* chronicled the sudden death of Mrs. Dinneford. Since there is a record of a "Mrs. Dinneford" in the Boston theatre in 1849 (William Warland Clapp, *A Record of the Boston Stage* [New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968], 456) and the *Spirit of the Times* in 1850, Dinneford would seem to have remarried another actress by 1849. (See "A Letter from 'Pipes,'" *Spirit of the Times* 20, no. 19 (June 29, 1850): 221.)

7. Durang never discloses how he knew Dinneford was Jewish (or of Jewish descent). He may have inferred it from Dinneford's marriage to a Jewish woman, or he may have had other information that has not survived in the historical record. He presents Dinneford's Jewish identity as a known fact. It also seems worth noting that Durang does not generally refer to other performers based on their religious heritage; he describes no "dashing Presbyterians," for example.

8. See Blake, *An Historical Account*, 188–89. According to Blake, Dinneford was a "native of Somersetshire, in England, and had been a clerk in a London banking-house; but becoming enamored of Isabella [sic] Mordecai, an employee of Drury Lane theatre, he married her and came to the United States about the year 1821. Changing his name from Ford to Dinneford, he went upon the stage, but failed to achieve any marked success as an actor. His business habits being good, he was employed to take charge of a large equestrian and dramatic company in the capacity of treasurer and business manager. This company he brought to Providence, on becoming the lessee of the theatre. . . . after one season's experience as a theatrical manager, he became a broker and dealer in lotteries, occasionally acting as an auctioneer, and finally opening a restaurant on Westminster Street, and a public house at Horton's Grove. Failing in business here, he moved to New York, opened the Franklin Street Theatre in Chatham Street" (see Blake, *An Historical Account*, 188–89). Blake's notes on Dinneford's origins, his marriage to a (presumably) Jewish actress, and his name change are useful, though Blake's account glosses many of the details of Dinneford's career.

9. William Dinneford to William Thompson, January, 31, 1829, MS Th1, box 8, L22, Boston (Federal Street) Theatre Collection, Boston Public Library.

10. William Thompson to William Dinneford, February 4, 1829, box 9, L 76, Boston (Federal Street) Theatre Collection, Boston Public Library.

11. William Dinneford to William Thompson, February 27, 1829, MS Th 1, box 8, L22, Boston (Federal Street) Theatre Collection, Boston Public Library.

12. John Paine to William Thompson, March 9, 1829, box 9, L 94, Boston (Federal Street) Theatre Collection, Boston Public Library.

13. William Dinneford to William Thompson, March 16, 1829, MS Th 1, box 8, L22, Boston (Federal Street) Theatre Collection, Boston Public Library

14. William Thompson to William Dinneford, May 1, 1829, MS Th1, box 8, L22, Boston (Federal Street) Theatre Collection, Boston Public Library.

15. C. Bradbury to William Dinneford, July 1, 1829, box 3, DD 263, Boston (Federal Street) Theatre Collection, Boston Public Library.

16. William Dinneford to C. Bradbury, July 13, 1829, box 3, DD 268 Boston (Federal Street) Theatre Collection, Boston Public Library.

17. William Dinneford to C. Bradbury, July 13, 1829, box 3, DD 268, Boston (Federal Street) Theatre Collection, Boston Public Library.

18. C. Bradbury to William Dinneford, July 17, 1829, box 3, DD 267 Boston (Federal Street) Theatre Collection, Boston Public Library.

19. Morais, *The Jews of Philadelphia*, 373; Abram C. Dayton, *Last Days of Knickerbocker Life in New York* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1897), 213.

20. Durang's history overlooks large sections of Dinneford's biography, which can be traced in national newspapers ranging from Newburyport, Massachusetts, to New Orleans.

21. Woloson, *In Hock*, 37–39.

22. For the various Jewish Boston theatre subscribers from 1794 to 1850, see the shareholder records in the Boston Theatre Collection at the Boston Public Library.

23. Blake, *An Historical Account*, 188–89.

24. "Notes on Landscapes in the Picture Gallery," *Publications of the Rhode Island Historical Society* 3, no. 3 (October 1895): 168.

25. AnnMarie Saunders, *To the Advantage of the City: Patriotism, Playgoing, and the First Washington Theaters* (PhD dissertation, University of Maryland, 2012).

26. Mrs. [Frances] Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (New York: Whittaker, Treacher, & Co. 1832), 185–86, quoted in "ART. V.—Domestic Manners of the Americans," *The American Quarterly Review* 12, no. 23 (September 1, 1832): 109.

27. While contemporary audiences would probably not find the promise of a new drop curtain a compelling reason to attend the theatre, nineteenth-century playgoers were keenly aware of how innovations to the space around them reflected their community's taste and elegance.

28. Blake, *An Historical Account*, 189.

29. Dinneford's travels took him to numerous cities throughout the United States, including Boston, New York, Providence, Newport, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and New Orleans. He died in Panama in 1852, possibly on his way to the Gold Rush in California.

30. Heather Roberts, "The Problem of the City," in *A Companion to American Fiction, 1780–1865*, ed. Shirley Samuels (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 289.

31. For the two letters see *The Broadway Journal*, April 19, 1845.

32. Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, act 4, scene 1.

33. Circus manager and performer J. J. Nathans, the Wallack family, the Gougenheim sisters, Frank Chanfrau, Adah Isaacs Menken, Rose Eytinge, and others all ventured westward to in search of new financial and artistic opportunities.

34. John J. Nathans is no known relation to my father's family, which first arrived in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century.

35. The performance at Philadelphia's National Circus is described on a playbill dated December 24, 1844, from the Playbill Collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia. The performance was repeated on January 27, 1845, as noted on another playbill in this collection.

36. Playbill dated January 27, 1845, Playbill Collection, Library Company of Philadelphia.
37. The piece was presented on May 22, 1843, at New York's Chatham Theatre, and described in Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, 4:645.
38. The story was also adapted for the French stage, most notably with Fromental Halévy's 1852 opera *Le Juif Errant*.
39. James Kirke Paulding, *Madmen All; or The Cure of Love* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1847), 180.
40. Paulding, *Madmen All*, 180.
41. Harry H. Marks, "Down with the Jews," *American Jewish Archives* 16, no. 1 (April 1964): 7.
42. It is worth noting that only Mrs. Keeley appears to have been of Jewish descent (or at least she was the only one of the two to acknowledge it). In fact, there are anecdotes in other performers' memoirs that describe Mr. Keeley as anti-Semitic. See M. J. Landa, *The Jew in Drama* (New York: W. Morrow, 1927), 186.
43. *The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine* 8, no. 5 (November 1836): 627.
44. Quoted in Goodman, *The Keeleys*, 244–45.
45. Morais gives a brief overview of Nathans's career (which he describes as "conspicuous"). See Morais, *The Jews of Philadelphia*, 378. Nathans's travels also took him to the West Indies and the Mediterranean (the latter during the Civil War). Some images of Nathans, as well as details about his family history and business networks, may be found on the website for the Circus Historical Society. For more information see <http://www.circushistory.org/index.htm>
46. Morais, *The Jews of Philadelphia*, 378.
47. Much has been made of the Booth family's Jewish ancestry, with some ascribing Junius Brutus Booth's success in the role of Shylock to the family's Portuguese Jewish heritage (Booth's ancestors apparently fled Portugal for England in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century). Certainly Edwin Booth took pains to expunge any hint of a Jewish connection, claiming that his father's success was due to his skill as a performer and his careful study of local Jews, rather than any closer connection. See Eleanor Bogles, *Edwin Booth, Prince of Players* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1953). Bogles claims Booth had an "Oriental strain" in his family heritage.
48. See the Lester Wallack Clipping File, Harvard Theatre Collection. Newspapers featured in the clippings file include the *Louisville Commercial*, the *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, the *Boston Herald*, the *Springfield Republican*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *St. Paul Globe*, and the *New Orleans Picayune*.
49. For additional examples, see the correspondence of James W. Wallack in the Simon Gratz Collection (Letters from the Wallack Family, box 288, folder 57). Several of the letters describe Wallack's efforts to develop "American" plays that might be suited for him to perform, yet they also note his efforts to prepare himself for his performances in England and elsewhere. They reflect his efforts (and perhaps those of his family) to shift back and forth between American and British sensibilities.
50. Marks, "Down with the Jews," 7.
51. Woloson, *In Hock*, 39. Less than one year after this cartoon was published, Theodore Moss was listed as the treasurer at New York Academy of Music performances of *Il Trovatore* and *La Traviata*.
52. "Politics no. III," *The Occident* 13, no. 3 (June 1855): 108.
53. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 6. Sarna queries why so many early nineteenth-century Jew-



ish Americans became journalists or defenders of the drama, attributing those choices to a “cosmopolitan outlook” that ran in direct opposition to the “insular, small-town ruralities” that demonstrated only minimal interest in cultural or political interests beyond their own narrow sphere.

54. For an overview of Rosewater’s career and family life, see the biographical material filed with the Rosewater Family Papers and available on the website of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center at the American Jewish Archives. He eventually trained as a telegraph operator and became a key figure in transmitting news during the Civil War.

55. September 19, 1859, Diary of Edward Rosewater, Rosewater Family Papers, Jacob Rader Marcus Center, American Jewish Archives.

56. See Rosewater’s diaries from November 1858 to April 1861. Note that *Lumpaci Vagabundus* translates as “Lumpaci the Vagabond.”

57. In 1860, he makes reference to his irritation at the “new” synagogue in Cincinnati, which tried to charge him a dollar to attend Rosh Hashanah services. He decided to go to the “old” synagogue instead. September 16, 1860, Diary of Edward Rosewater, Rosewater Family Papers, Jacob Rader Marcus Center, American Jewish Archives.

58. *The Israelite* records the founding of the Hebrew Young Men’s Association of the City of New York in its May 30, 1852, issue. Its original members were among some of the city’s more important Jewish families. The history of Jewish *charitable* associations stretches back much earlier than these cultural ventures. Those associations tended the sick, helped mourners sitting *shiva*, raised funds for food and fuel for the needy, etc. Almost every major urban center with an established Jewish community boasted men’s (and often women’s) charitable organizations.

59. *The Israelite* 1, no. 21 (December 22, 1854): 191.

60. *The Israelite* 1, no. 22 (December 29, 1854): 196.

61. There were so many Jewish American amateur and charitable associations by the winter of 1855 that an essay in *The Israelite* recommended they consider merging to consolidate their efforts. See *The Israelite* 2, no. 24 (December 21, 1855): 194.

62. *The Israelite* 2, no. 12 (September 28, 1855): 92–93.

63. *The Israelite* 2, no. 12 (September 28, 1855): 92–93.

64. *The Israelite* 3, vol. 35 (March 6, 1857): 278. *The Israelite* also reported regularly on Jewish American celebrations, concerts, and charitable activities in other cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and New Orleans.

65. *The Israelite* 1, no. 31 (March 2, 1855): 270.

66. *The Israelite* 1, no. 31 (March 2, 1855): 270.

67. For more about Pike, see the Pike Family Papers, Jacob Rader Marcus Center, American Jewish Archives; Whiteman, “Notions, Dry Goods, and Clothing,” 306–18; and Jonathan D. Sarna and Nancy H. Klein, *The Jews of Cincinnati* (Cincinnati: Center for the Study of the Jewish American Experience, 1989), 36.

68. Untitled clipping dated March 23, 1866, Pike Family Papers, Jacob Rader Marcus Center, American Jewish Archives.

69. *The Israelite* 5, no. 37 (March 18, 1859): 287.

70. *The Israelite* 5, no. 38 (March 25, 1859): 302.

71. James Francis Dunlap, *Queen City Stages: Professional Dramatic Activity in Cincinnati, 1837–1861* (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1954), 1,691.

72. “Music and Drama,” undated clipping, Pike Family Papers, Jacob Rader Marcus Center, American Jewish Archives.



73. Untitled clipping, 1866, Pike Family Papers, Jacob Rader Marcus Center, American Jewish Archives.

74. In 1875, Arizona settler Mark Lulley would open a mine that he named (in his own honor) the “Wandering Jew,” since he was known as “Lucky Lulley, the Wandering Jew.” Harriet Rochlin and Fred Rochlin, *Pioneer Jews: A New Life in the Far West* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 35. Lulley appears to have had a sense of humor about how he may have been viewed by non-Jews.

75. As noted above, William Dinneford died in Panama in 1852, which suggests he *may* have been on his way to California, since that was one route that would-be gold seekers followed.

76. Quoted in Rochlin and Rochlin, *Pioneer Jews*, 26. The citation above includes equally unflattering terms for each of the nationalities mentioned, so at least the original author was an equal-opportunity bigot.

77. The memoirs of one Abraham Abrahamsohn chronicle his experiences in the Gold Rush, including his work as a *mohel* (one who performs ritual circumcisions) in San Francisco. Abrahamsohn's impression of early 1850s San Francisco was that “Jews in that city rivaled the increase of their ancestors in Egypt.” Quoted in Rochlin and Rochlin, *Pioneer Jews*, 30.

78. *Daily Alta California*, September 18, 1858.

79. *Daily Alta California*, September 18, 1858.

80. *Daily Alta California*, September 18, 1858.

81. Charles E. De Long, “California's Bantam Cock: The Journals of Charles E. De Long, 1854–1863,” ed. Carl I. Wheat, *California Historical Society Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (June 1930): 57. Published by University of California Press in association with the California Historical Society Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25178066>

82. Quoted in George R. MacMinn, *The Theater of the Golden Era in California* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1941), 176. These dark-haired, vivacious sisters had much in common with Rose Eyttinge, another Jewish American star who made a hit on the San Francisco stage in the years after the Civil War. Eyttinge, often known as the “Black-eyed Jewess,” performed in San Francisco, Reno, and other western cities in the 1870s and returned to the San Francisco stage at age sixty-eight for a farewell performance.

83. He was the editor of San Francisco's *The Golden Era* in 1854 and also worked for the *Daily Alta*, the *Morning Call*, and the *Argus* at various points in his career. He died on February 14, 1873, in Washington, DC.

84. The “Day of Vengeance” refers to the 9th (or 10th) of Ab (August), which is a day of mourning for Jews and commemorates, among other misfortunes, the burning of the Temple in Jerusalem.

85. Manuel M. Noah, “Day of Vengeance,” in *Odd-Fellows Offering for 1852, Embellished with Elegant Engravings and a Highly-Finished Presentation Plate contributed chiefly by members of the order, their wives and sisters* (New York: Edward Walker, 1852), 207–8.

86. *The Daily Alta*. Maguire's theatre went through numerous incarnations over a roughly ten-year period. It burned to the ground at least three times, and each time its intrepid manager, Tom Maguire, rebuilt the playhouse.

87. The *San Francisco Call* suggested that Noah had written the play specifically for Mrs. Wood. See *San Francisco Call*, January 26, 1902. But since the play opened at the American Theatre on February 12, 1855, this may not be accurate. Or Noah may have revised the play for Mrs. Wood when she came to San Francisco.

88. *Daily Alta*, September 6, 1858.

89. Peter Moylan, “Emperor Norton,” *Encyclopedia of San Francisco*, <http://www.sfhistory.encyclopedia.com/articles/n/nortonjoshua.html>, accessed October 25, 2014.

90. Norton supposedly proclaimed at one point, “How can I be a Jew when I am related to the Bourbons, who as everybody knows are not Jews?” Quoted in “The First Emperor of the United States,” *The Youth’s Companion* 42, no. 46 (November 18, 1869): 365. Despite this statement he continued to visit the city’s synagogues.

91. Quoted in “Joshua A. Norton,” the Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist1/norton.html>, accessed October 25, 2014.

92. *The Golden Era*, September 17, 1861.

93. Lois M. Foster, *Annals of the San Francisco Stage, 1850–1880* (San Francisco: Federal Theatre Projects, 1936), 1:415.

94. Foster, *Annals of the San Francisco Stage*, 1:415. I note that these were “reported” proclamations from Norton, since local newspaper editors delighted in issuing statements on his behalf for the entertainment of their readers. Norton’s warnings went unheeded, and in 1873 one of California’s soon-to-be-famous Jewish theatre artists, David Belasco, played Norton onstage. See William Winter, *The Life of David Belasco* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1920), 1:37–38.

## Chapter Five

1. Miss Hallam played the role for at least the next twenty years, as she is listed as Jessica in a 1773 production of *Merchant* at Philadelphia’s Southwark Theatre. Though at age thirty-six Miss Hallam would seem to too old for the role of the ingénue Jessica, eighteenth-century actresses often retained their claim to roles throughout their careers.

2. Manganelli, *Transatlantic Spectacles of Race*, 131.

3. Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz*, 22–23. “Domestic feminism” is obviously an anachronistic term for the nineteenth century, but it offers a useful shorthand for describing the complex roles that so many Jewish American women and Jewish female stage characters enacted during this period.

4. Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation*, 119.

5. *The Merchant of Venice* had been adapted in 1701 as *The Jew of Venice*, a more comical version that presented Shylock as an openly villainous yet cartoonish figure. It is difficult to say which “version” of *Merchant* colonial audiences would have seen during the first half of the eighteenth century.

6. Ellen Schiff argues that the traditional stage Jewess was often paired with “her father, whose blatantly objectionable traits she is intended to counterbalance.” See Schiff, “What Kind of Way,” 106–19.

7. Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz*, 17. Jessica is not the only dramatic or literary representation of a Jewish woman who chooses a Christian husband, though she is the best-known of this period. See Harap, *The Image of the Jew*, 42.

8. While some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jewish and Gentile critics commented on negative stereotypes of Jewish *men* on the American stage, none seem to have found representations of Jewish *women* objectionable.

9. It is always problematic to claim an “original” version of a Shakespearean text. In this case, Charles Macklin replaced the popular *Jew of Venice* with something more nearly resembling the sixteenth-century version presented to Shakespeare’s audiences.

10. For more on this development, see Heather S. Nathans, “O my ducats, O my daugh-

ter': Seductions and Sentimental Conversions of Jewish Female Characters in the Early American Theater," in *Atlantic Worlds in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Toni Bowers and Tita Chico (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 115–33.

11. See, for example, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 11, 1766; and *Pennsylvania Journal*, December 11, 1766.

12. This song contains numerous "runs," or clusters of notes that require a singer to shift between notes and keys very rapidly. My thanks to Dr. Tracey Chessum for her help in deciphering the song's musical structure.

13. "Jessica's Song in the Merchant of Venice," Lester S. Levy Collection, Johns Hopkins University. While this piece of sheet music is undated, a similar piece of music (identical typeface and format and also part of the Levy Collection) carries the printer's identification of Benjamin Carr in New York. That other piece of sheet music is for a performance of *The Children in the Wood*, featuring Miss Solomon(s) that took place in or around 1794; it is possible [likely?] the sheet music for "Jessica's song" is American imprint from roughly that same period. The original version of "Jessica's Song" dates back to at least 1770, if not earlier. One version was printed in London in 1770 and the composer is listed as Joseph Baidon (a popular composer of the period). I thank the staff at the American Antiquarian Society for helping me to locate an imprint of this song.

14. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, act 2, scene 5.

15. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, act 4, scene 1.

16. Samuel Rogers, "The Lyre—Description of Venice," *The Pilot*, August 7, 1823.

17. I explore this connection in greater detail in a chapter that appeared in *Atlantic Worlds in the Long Eighteenth Century*. I thank its editors, Dr. Bowers and Dr. Chico, for their valuable insights on my work, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to develop part of this project with their guidance.

18. Julia A. Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 31.

19. Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 27.

20. Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 3.

21. Thomas Jordan, "The Forfeiture, a Romance" (1664), quoted in Horace Howard Furness, ed., *The Merchant of Venice*, in the *New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*, vol. II (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1888), app. 462–63. Jordan's poem is a bastardized version of the *Merchant* story.

22. Those invocations generally focused on Shylock as a figure pursuing his private agenda rather than acting for the public good.

23. Abigail Franks writes of her daughter's elopement to her son, "Heartsey." See Abigail Franks to [Naphthali] "Heartsey" Franks, June 7, 1743, Franks Family Papers, box 1, American Jewish Historical Society. These networks are discussed in Diner and Benderly, *Her Works Praise Her*, 25. Two of her three children (including one son) married outside the faith and her grandchildren were raised as Christians (though many historians still continued to identify them as Jewish, as in the case of Rebecca Franks).

24. Holly Snyder, "Queens of the Household: The Jewish Women of British America, 1700–1800," in *Women and American Judaism: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2001), 27.

25. Abigail Franks to [Naphthali] "Heartsey" Franks, June 7, 1743, Franks Family Papers, box 1, American Jewish Historical Society.

26. Fichtelberg, *Critical Fictions*, 14.
27. Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 1:44.
28. "The Beautiful Jewess Who was Called the Princess of Her People," *The Ladies' Home Journal* 18, no. 5 (April 1901): 7.
29. [John André], Sketch of a Meschianza Costume, 1778, Library Company of Philadelphia. André's sketch has been photographed by the Library Company of Philadelphia and made available at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/library-company-of-philadelphia/2919843681/>. The image was also published in John Watson's *Extra-Illustrated Manuscript of Annals of Philadelphia* (1830). Descriptions of the costumes (including the reference to the women in Turkish trousers) may also be found in Jared Brown, *The Theatre in America during the Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 51.
30. Images and tickets for the Meschianza are housed at the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the York County Heritage Trust. Some of these artifacts have been digitally reproduced and made available online at: <http://www.librarycompany.org/artifacts/meschianza.htm> and <http://johndurang.yorkheritage.org/?p=5>
31. In a letter from Rebecca Franks to Mrs. Andrew Hamilton (née Abigail Franks?) from Flatbush, New York, and dated August 10, 1781, Rebecca complains about New York and says that she misses both her beaux and the luxuries she is accustomed to getting from England and elsewhere in the colonies. See the Society Collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
32. Malini Johar Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790–1890* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 65.
33. Susanna Rowson, *Slaves in Algiers; or, A Struggle for Freedom*, in *Plays by Early American Women, 1775–1850*, ed. Amelia Howe Kritzer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 59–60, quoted in Amelia Howe Kritzer, "Comedies by Early American Women," *The Cambridge Companion to American Women Playwrights*, ed. Brenda Murphy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6.
34. Zoe Detsi-Diamanti, *Early American Women Dramatists, 1775–1860* (New York: Garland, 1998), 69–70. *Slaves in Algiers* enjoyed a moderate success on the national stage, exciting the animosity of figures such as newspaper editor William Cobbett (alias "Peter Porcupine"), who found Rowson's female-centered patriotism antithetical to his notions of women's proper roles.
35. Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz*, 39.
36. This was prior to the debut of *Ivanhoe* on the national stage.
37. Not only did eighteenth-century versions of *Merchant* feature added musical numbers as noted above, actors were called upon to sing during the entr'actes or as in afterpieces. For example, the *New York Commercial Advertiser* noted on May 17, 1799, that Mrs. Seymour (who was also playing Jessica that evening in *Merchant*) would sing a favorite tune titled "Four and Twenty Fiddlers."
38. Rankin notes that Wainwright had been specially recruited from London by the company because she had been "tutored by Doctor Thomas Arne, London's renowned voice teacher." See Rankin, *The Theater in Colonial America*, 100.
39. The sarcastic comment concerning the songs comes from theatre historian George C. Odell, but it speaks to the way Jessica's role had become largely a showpiece for pretty young singers, rather than serious actresses. See Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, vol. 2, 57.
40. *New York Morning Chronicle*, December 6, 1804. Mrs. Darley (née Westray) debuted as Jessica the previous evening.

41. See John Durang, *The Memoir of John Durang: American Actor, 1785–1816*, ed. Alan S. Downer (Pittsburgh: Published for the Historical Society of York County and the American Society for Theatre Research by the University of Pittsburgh Press, 1966), 107.

42. “Monthly Dramatic Review,” *The Polyanthos*, February 1, 1814.

43. “THEATRICAL REGISTER,” *The Ramblers’ Magazine, and New-York Theatrical Register*, January 2, 1809.

44. Evidence cited in Kalman Burnim’s essay “The Jewish Presence in the London Theatre, 1660–1800” reveals a marked contrast between how American and British audiences received Jewish actresses or female Jewish characters. For example, Burnim cites Pepys’s 1667 recollection of visiting the actress Mrs. Manuell, whom he called “the Jew’s wife,” and Burnim quotes disparaging comments made in the 1780s about Maria Teresia Bland, imputing her dark face and hairy chin to “her Jewish background.” Burnim also cites the history of Mary Wells, who converted to Judaism at the time of her marriage, a move that the *Morning Post* concluded will “greatly satisfy her passion for eccentricity.” See Burnim, “The Jewish Presence in the London Theatre,” 69, 75, 89.

45. Elizabeth Arnold Poe is buried in an Episcopalian graveyard in Virginia, though her grave site is unmarked. Samuel Mordecai (a member of the prominent Mordecai family of Virginia and North Carolina and a shareholder in the Richmond Theatre) described Eliza Poe’s home as a popular destination for Richmond theatre enthusiasts.

46. Una Pope Hennessey, *Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Haskell House, 1934), 149, books.google.com/books?id=vlvMwKUtUCEC

47. Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles in Early America*, 181, 208. “Black but very comely” is an allusion to the Bible verse in the Song of Solomon: “I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem” (1:5, AV).

48. Carol Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 440. For a discussion of Fielding’s “American” blackness, also see Samuel Otter, *Philadelphia Stories: America’s Literature of Race and Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

49. Cited in Anne C. Rose, *Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 48.

50. *The Colored American*, August 3, 1839. This claim from French author Chateaubriand’s 1836 “The Beauty of the Jewess” was republished on August 3, 1839, by the African American newspaper *The Colored American*, a setting that must strike the contemporary reader as puzzling given the often troubled status of black women in early nineteenth-century American culture.

51. Roberta Mock, *Jewish Women on Stage, Film, and Television* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 7.

52. There appear to have been at least two Miss Solomons who performed on the early national stage. The senior Miss Solomon (after the debut of her sister) was sometimes known as Miss C. Solomon(s) and her sister as Miss M. Solomon(s). Playbills, however, do not always include the first initial, so it is often challenging to determine which Miss Solomon performed in a particular piece. They appear to have been relatively close in age, judging by their debuts (one was likely in Philadelphia in 1794 and the other in Charleston in 1799).

53. “The Garland—No. III, To Miss Solomons,” *Philadelphia Minerva*, April 2, 1796. Miss Solomon(s) sustained an active professional career in the United States into at least the first decade of the 1800s.

54. Reese Davis James, *Cradle of Culture, 1800–1810: The Philadelphia Stage* (Philadelphia:

University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), 48. The spectacle James describes might be compared to the Meschianza in which Rebecca Franks had played the role of a beautiful spirit inspiring noble heroes roughly three decades earlier.

55. Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles in Early America*, 235.

56. See the extensive discussion of this topic in Manganelli's *Transatlantic Spectacles of Race*.

57. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Consular Letters, 1853–1857*, vol. 21 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1962), 481, quoted in David Greven, "Hawthorne and the Gender of Jewishness: Anti-Semitism, Aesthetics, and Sexual Politics in *The Marble Faun*," *Journal of American Culture* 35, no. 2 (June 2012): 136.

58. Diner and Benderly, *Her Works Praise Her*, 23.

59. Quoted in *The Jews in America: A Treasury of Art and Literature*, ed. Abraham Karp (Southport, CT: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 1994), 48–50, in Diner and Benderly, *Her Works Praise Her*, 16.

60. Diner and Benderly, *Her Works Praise Her*, 20.

61. In addition to the problem of sustaining basic religious practices, Jewish Americans also faced new challenges as old boundaries between Sephardic and Ashkenazi traditions began to fracture under the pressure of multiple streams of Jewish immigrants from Europe. Mothers questioned not whether they could let their sons and daughters marry outside the faith, but outside familiar markers that had defined *their* understanding of Jewishness. Diner and Benderly, *Her Works Praise Her*, 33.

62. Dibdin, *The Jew and Doctor*, 10.

63. Hannah More, *Moses in the Bulrushes: A Sacred Drama in Three Parts (this subject is taken from the second chapter of the book of Exodus)* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas, Jr., 1813). Note that More's name is also sometimes spelled Moore.

64. The copy of this play housed at the American Jewish Historical Society features faint writing on the tops of pages five and eleven, possibly indicating the names of previous owners—Jacob and Esther—suggesting that despite the author's Christian background, the work belonged to two Jewish children.

65. More, *Moses in the Bulrushes*, 9.

66. More, *Moses in the Bulrushes*, 10.

67. Penny Bradshaw, "Women Romantic Poets," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible in English Literature*, ed. Rebecca Lemon, Emma Mason, Jonathan Roberts, and Christopher Rowland (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 386.

68. More, *Moses in the Bulrushes*, 23.

69. Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (London: T. Cadell, 1830), 5:40; cited in Bradshaw, "Women Romantic Poets," 388. On the surface More's drama of Moses may seem a paean to Jewish piety, but scholar Ellen Smith includes the play in a list of works with an underlying message concerning Jewish conversion. See Ellen Smith, "'Israelites in Boston,' 1840–1880," in *The Jews of Boston*, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna, Ellen Smith, and Scott-Martin Kosofsky (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2005), 46.

70. Rachel Mordecai to Maria Edgeworth, August 15, 1815, Small Collections, Jacob Rader Marcus Center, American Jewish Archives. Also see Bingham, *Mordecai*, 67.

71. Richard Lovell Edgeworth, preface to Maria Edgeworth, *Harrington* (1817), in *Tales and Novels of Maria Edgeworth* (London: Baldwin and Craddock, 1833), 17:v, quoted in Bingham, *Mordecai*, 67.

72. In the story, Simon is an "Old Clothes Man," a stereotypical profession for eighteenth-



century British Jews. Selling pork pies would already mark the seller as a bad Jew, since pork was obviously *trayfe* (not kosher) for observant members of the community. The notion that Jews murdered Christians for blood to make ritual cakes and bread was another familiar Gentile myth, one that persisted well into the nineteenth century.

73. Maria Edgeworth, *Harrington* (Boston: Samuel H. Parker), 1825, 9.

74. Edgeworth, *Harrington*, 61.

75. As Edgeworth reveals, the Monteneros had been living in America, as did many Spanish-born or descended Jews imperiled by that country's anti-Semitism. But they retain some Spanish customs, as evidenced by some of the women in the novel mocking Berenice's Spanish style of dressing.

76. Edgeworth, *Harrington*, 67.

77. Edgeworth, *Harrington*, 67.

78. Rachel Mordecai to Maria Edgeworth, August 15, 1815, Small Collections, Jacob Rader Marcus Center, American Jewish Archives. Also see Bingham, *Mordecai*, 67.

79. Edgeworth, *Harrington*, 67.

80. Rachel Mordecai to Maria Edgeworth, October 28, 1817, Small Collections, Jacob Rader Marcus Center, American Jewish Archives. "Cumberland's Sheva" refers to Richard Cumberland's *The Jew; or, The Benevolent Hebrew*.

81. Rachel Mordecai to Maria Edgeworth, October 28, 1817, Small Collections, Jacob Rader Marcus Center, American Jewish Archives. Note the parallel to David Franks, father of Rebecca Franks, who married a Christian and did not convert or ask his wife to convert, but raised his family in a household with two faith traditions.

82. Quoted in Manganelli, *Transatlantic Spectacles of Race*, 104.

83. For more on how *Harrington* aligns with a long-standing tradition of Jewish representation in British Literature, see Michael Ragussis, "Representation, Conversion, and Literary Form: 'Harrington' and the Novel of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (Autumn 1989): 113–43.

84. Edgeworth, *Harrington*, 187.

85. Cha[rl]es H. Moise, *The Hebrew Journal* (New York), December 1887, quoted in Lucien Wolf, ed., *The History and Genealogy of the Jewish Families of Yates and Samuel of Liverpool from Materials Collected by Stuart M. Samuel, M.P.* (London: [Mitchell and Hughes, Printers], 1901), 24. Also see <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31158010477866;view=1up;seq=50>

86. Moise, *The Hebrew Journal*, 25.

87. A letter describing their performance is quoted in Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 287. For Levy's play, see <https://archive.org/details/italianbrideapl00levygoog>. The *North Carolina University Magazine* described it as a "well conceived and well written play." In it, Venetia's lover, Clodio, is framed for the murder of her father by the evil Francesco (who is also in love with Clodio). Eventually Francesco's plot is discovered and Clodio freed just before he is about to be tortured to death. For more on the production at Wallack's Theatre, see the *North Carolina University Magazine* 7, no. 4 (November 1857): 160, <https://books.google.com/books?id=QgcyQAAMAAJ&pg=PA160&lpg=PA160&dq=eliza+logan+actress+italian+bride>

88. Interestingly, Levy Phillips never concealed her Jewish identity (even though the history of the Yates family quoted in Wolf suggests that her family moved to Savannah to escape anti-Semitic bias in Charleston). One of her sisters, Phoebe, married a Christian named Thomas Pember. After his death, she ran a Confederate hospital in Richmond. For more on



Phoebe and Eugenia, see Robert N. Rosen's sixth chapter ("Two Jewish Confederate Sisters") of *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000). Also see Bertram M. Korn, "The Jews of the Confederacy," *American Jewish Archives* 13, no. 1 (April 1961): 3–90.

89. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 291. Also see the account in Korn, "The Jews of the Confederacy," 42–44.

90. Eugenia Phillips's politics differed sharply from those of her husband. She staunchly defended the Confederate cause, while he argued passionately against secession.

91. See Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 292–93. Phillips was far from the only Jewish heroine of the Confederacy. Her sister, Phoebe Levy Pember, was the wartime director of the largest hospital in the South, and other Southern Jewish women gained reputations as nurses, including Carolyn Long Smith (Schmidt), who was described as a "noble Jewish lady" during her wartime work and who founded a Hebrew Benevolent Society in Anniston, Georgia, after the war. See the Sterne Family Papers (and biographical information in that collection), Jacob Rader Marcus Center, American Jewish Archives.

92. Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 155.

93. Brooks queries Menken's sincerity in her performances of Southern womanhood, observing that Menken shifted her rhetoric numerous times throughout her career, even claiming to be a quadroon at times. There have been excellent scholarly studies of Menken's career, including Brooks's work, as well as Renee M. Sentilles, *Performing Menken: Adah Isaacs Menken and the Birth of American Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). There are also a handful of popular works on her life and career.

94. The craze for adapting *Ivanhoe* foreshadowed the craze for staging *Uncle Tom's Cabin* some thirty years later. Thomas Dibdin, George Soane, Samuel Beazley, and William Thomas Moncrieff all produced adaptations of *Ivanhoe* shortly after the publication of Scott's novel, and many other adaptations emerged over the next fifty years, including various burlesque versions that were onstage well into the 1890s. For more information, see Frederick Burwick, "The Jew on the Romantic Stage," in *Romanticism/Judaica: A Conversion of Cultures*, ed. Sheila A. Spector (Burlington: Ashgate, 1988), 112. Also see listings for *Ivanhoe* and its various spin-offs in Odell's *Annals of the New York Stage*.

95. Maria Edgeworth to Rachel Mordecai, April 19, 1824, Small Collections, Jacob Rader Marcus Center, American Jewish Archives.

96. Rebecca Gratz to Maria (Mrs. Benjamin) Gratz, April 4, 1820, Gratz Family Papers, American Jewish Historical Society.

97. Dramatizations of Scott's novel are sometimes challenging to identify, since managers often altered the title to emphasize different elements of the story. For example, the New York version was also known as *The Jew and his Daughter*. Another version appeared as simply *The Hebrew*, and Rossini's operatic rendition was known as *The Maid of Judah* (there is also another, nonoperatic version of the play with this same title). All of these adaptations focus on Rebecca.

98. Rebecca Gratz to Miriam Cohen (her niece), January 21, 1844, and February 6, 1844, Miriam Gratz Moses Cohen Papers #2639, Southern Historical Collection, the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

99. Schiff, "What Kind of Way," 107. Manganelli, *Transatlantic Spectacles of Race*, 105–6.

100. Many stage versions of *Ivanhoe* include costume descriptions for the characters. Additionally, the vivid descriptions in Scott's novels inspired a series of portraits, a number of

which were published for fans of his work. Several of these show Rebecca wearing a modified “Turkish” costume (with pantaloons peeping out from under the hem of her dress—an echo of the Meschianza costumes described above).

101. Thomas Dibdin, *Ivanhoe; or, the Jew’s Daughter* (London: Roach and Company, 1820), 48.

102. Dibdin, *Ivanhoe; or, the Jew’s Daughter*, 44–46.

103. As my colleague Aaron Tobiasson has observed, separating anti-Semitism from basic misogyny can be challenging in this kind of scenario. But since Bois-Guilbert invokes her faith as the only point that stands between Rebecca’s rape and her lawful marriage, it seems plausible that the conquest here is partly rooted in religion.

104. In a letter describing a Jewish wedding he attended, Benjamin Rush wrote of the young bride: “Innocence, modesty, fear, respect, and devotion appeared all at once in her countenance.” Letter from Benjamin Rush to his daughter Julia, June 27, 1787, Philadelphia, quoted in Edwin Wolf and Max Whiteman, *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1957), 198–99. Whereas earlier heroines such as Jessica, Fethnah, Berenice, and others willingly embraced Christianity, emerging heroines of the 1820s presented alternate options for Jewish and Gentile audiences. A revolutionary example came to Boston playgoers in 1838 by way of British poet and playwright Thomas Wade’s controversial 1830 tragedy *The Jew of Arragon; or, the Hebrew Queen*. Wade’s play was written as a response to debates about Jewish rights in Great Britain, but it drew attention in American papers at the time of its debut because it starred Fanny Kemble as “a royal Jewish maiden” (italics in original). It was produced at Boston’s Tremont Theatre in 1838 and the promptbook is housed at the Harvard Theatre Collection. For more on the play’s debut, see, “ITEMS,” *The New-England Galaxy and United States Literary Advertiser* 13 (November 19, 1830): 2. As the paper noted, Wade also believed that his play echoed the story of Esther: “By the characters of Xavier and Rachel, the reader may be not infrequently reminded of the origin of the ‘days of Purim,’ which inspired for France one of the most forcible of the elegant dramatic poems of the classical Racine.”

105. Diner and Binderly, *Her Works Praise Her*, 41.

106. Wolf and Whiteman, *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia*, 276–77; Rollin G. Osterweis, *Rebecca Gratz: A Study in Charm* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1935), 172–81.

107. [Leeser], *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate* 7, no. 9 (December 1849): 470–71; and 7, no. 10 (January 1850): 517–18.

108. Gratz’s letters refer to Aguilar’s poetry. Penina Moise, a Charleston-born Jew who gained acclaim in 1833 for her collection *Fancy’s Sketch Book*, would remain loyal to the Confederacy. Moise grew up in the same circles as playwrights Isaac Harby and Mordecai Manuel Noah (who lived in Charleston in his youth).

109. Lee C. Harby, “Penina Moise: Woman and Writer,” *American Jewish Year Book* 7 (1905–1906): 17–31.

110. Rebecca Gratz to Miriam Cohen, January 21, 1844, Miriam Gratz Moses Cohen Papers #2639, Southern Historical Collection, the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

111. Grace Aguilar to Miriam Cohen, March 17, 1846, Miriam Gratz Moses Cohen Papers #2639, Southern Historical Collection, the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Gratz, Cohen, and their families exchanged letters about their theatre-going on a consistent basis. For example, on November 15, 1860, Miriam’s son wrote her from Philadelphia describing seeing Booth’s Hamlet. He states, “His rendering of the character of

that unhappy young Prince shall never be forgotten by me." Gratz Cohen to Miriam Cohen, November 15, 1860, Miriam Gratz Moses Cohen Papers #2639, Southern Historical Collection, the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

112. Benjamin Maria Baader, "Die Deborah," *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, Jewish Women's Archive, last modified March 1, 2009, <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/die-deborah>, accessed January 17, 2015.

113. Baader, "Die Deborah." Also see Werner Sollors, "German, Jewish, American: Magic Words that Define Judaism in the Cincinnati Deborah," in *The Turn Around Religion in America: Literature, Culture, and the Works of Sacvan Bercovitch*, ed. Nan Goodman and Michael P. Kramer (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 369–88.

114. *The Israelite* carried frequent news of Menken's doings as well.

115. *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate* 7, no. 8 (November 1849): 408.

116. There are literally *hundreds* of examples of the story of Esther invoked in American sermons, children's literature, short fiction, Sunday school plays, etc., by both Jewish and Gentile audiences. I have tried to provide a representative sampling, particularly those most relevant to discussions of theatrical or domestic representations of Jewish female characters.

117. Esther proved a particularly adaptable story for juvenile audiences, and appeared in journals such as *The Youth's Companion*, as well as various Christian literary publications.

118. Amira Carpenter Thompson, *A Sacred Drama on the Book of Esther*, in *The Lyre of Tioga* (Geneva, NY: J. Rogert, 1829).

119. Royall Tyler, *The Origin of the Feast of Purim; Or, The Destinies of Haman & Mordecai: A Sacred Drama in Three Acts Taken Principally from the Book of Esther*, in *Four Plays by Royall Tyler*, ed. Arthur Wallace Peach and George Floyd Newbrough (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res\\_ver=0.2&res\\_id=xri:ilcs-us&rft\\_id=xri:ilcs:ft:amdram:Z000778436:0](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:ilcs-us&rft_id=xri:ilcs:ft:amdram:Z000778436:0). For more on Tyler's Old Testament plays see Jaher, *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness*, 159–60; and Herbert L. Carson and Ada Lou Carson, "The Jews, Royall Tyler, and America's Divided Mind," *American Jewish Archives Journal* 28, no. 1 (1976): 79–84.

120. Daniel Wise, "PENCILINGS AND PORTRAITS OF FEMALE CHARACTER," *The Ladies' Repository* 17 (January 1, 1858): 17.

121. See Susan Bennett, "Genre Trouble," in *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 215–32. Bennett explores Elizabeth Polack's experiments with the genre of "Eastern melodrama." Note that though her message was one of political tolerance, Polack also offered audiences the exotic spectacle they associated with stage Jewesses, as well as with historical dramas, and that they certainly saw in other dramas such as *The Jew of Arragon* or *The Council of Constance*. In the script published after the original London production, the costume notes show that once Esther becomes queen, she changes from a dress of "drab cambric" to an "under dress of white satin, round gown and train of net, spotted and richly trimmed with silver. A deep round cape of the same fastened on each shoulder. Persian turban of silver tissue, richly ornamented, white satin shoes, sandalled." See Polack, *Esther, The Royal Jewess*.

122. Polack, *Esther*, 30.

123. "MADEMOISELLE RACHEL," *Spirit of the Times* 9, no. 13 (June 1, 1839): 147.

124. See also, "THE HEROIC CHARACTER OF WOMAN. BY THE AUTHOR OF 'SELF GOVERNMENT,'" *The Orion* 2, no. 4 (February 1843): 243.

125. Rebecca Gratz to Miriam Cohen, March [1838?], Miriam Gratz Moses Cohen Papers #2639, Southern Historical Collection, the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

126. See the description of the 1859 Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society Purim Ball in *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate* 17, no. 2 (April 7, 1850): 12.

127. One of the most notable dramas to feature a Purim Ball was *Sarah the Jewess*, a British-authored piece that captivated American audiences. I discuss it in greater detail in chapter 6. While noteworthy for its representation of a strong female Jewish character, I focus particularly on the play's anti-assimilationist message.

128. Rosalie Manahan to Isaac Leiser, November 29, 1859, Gershwind-Bennett Isaac Leiser Digital Repository, University of Pennsylvania Libraries, [http://leiser.library.upenn.edu/documentDisplay.php?id=LSDCBx2FF6\\_40](http://leiser.library.upenn.edu/documentDisplay.php?id=LSDCBx2FF6_40), accessed December 31, 2014.

129. Rosalie Manahan, "Our Purim Dinner, Or what the moonlight saw in the summer-house," *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate* 19, no. 4 (July 1861): 177.

130. Manahan, "Our Purim Dinner," 178–79.

131. Bridget speaks in a very broad, stereotyped Irish dialect, while the girls speak "American" (that is to say "neutral") English. It would be interesting to explore a Jewish American author's exploitation of Irish stereotypes, particularly in the development of middle-class domestic hierarchies.

132. The play mentions America five times. First as a destination for the escaping lovers and then as a refuge for the Jews unfairly persecuted by the Austrian authorities. Augustin Daly, *Leah, the Forsaken* (New York: Samuel French, 1872), [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pql:res\\_ver=0.2&res\\_id=xri:ilcs-us&rft\\_id=xri:ilcs:ftr:amdram:Z000614327:0](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pql:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:ilcs-us&rft_id=xri:ilcs:ftr:amdram:Z000614327:0)

133. Daly, *Leah, the Forsaken*, 44.

134. Quoted in Stefanie Halpern, "Kate Bateman, Sanitizing the Beautiful Jewess," *TDR: The Drama Review* 55, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 77.

135. *The Jewish Messenger*, January 23, 1863.

136. *New-York Daily Tribune*, January 26, 1863.

137. *The Jewish Messenger*, February 2, 1863.

138. Moos, *Mortara, or the Pope's Inquisitors*, 76.

139. Moos, *Mortara, or the Pope's Inquisitors*, 96.

140. Rose Eytinge, *The memories of Rose Eytinge; Being Recollections & Observations of Men, Women, and Events, during half a century* (New York: F. A. Stokes & Co., 1905), 76–77.

## Chapter Six

1. Psalm 137:5.

2. Manuel Josephson to Moses Seixas, February 4, 1790, in *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 27 (1920): 188, cited in Sarna, *American Judaism*, 14.

3. <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-07-02-0036>. A parnas is the president or leader of a synagogue's governing board.

4. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail the ongoing and complex struggles between the diverse Jewish traditions that sought recognition in antebellum American culture, such as the friction between Sephardic and Ashkenazic traditions, or to unpack the debate over the reform movement. Throughout the chapter, I will refer to these various issues and explain the background on each as concisely as possible. For more information on the development of antebellum American Judaism, the most comprehensive source is Jonathan Sarna's masterful study, *American Judaism: A History*.

5. "Blood libel" refers to the myth that Jews kidnapped and killed Christians to use their blood in Jewish rituals.

6. Authorship of some of Judah's later dramas, including *David and Uriah* and *The Maid of Midian*, is in dispute (some scholars ascribe authorship of *David and Uriah* and *The Maid of Midian* to William Sinclair, for example). The Library Company of Philadelphia, however, holds copies of *Samson's Exploits: Exhibiting* and *The Mystical Craft*, both of which are attributed to Judah, and the latter features an advertisement printed on the inside cover stating that "For Sale, at the 'Beacon' Office, 94 Roosevelt St., New York, *The Mystical Craft*, *The Maid of Midian* (by the author of '*The Mystical Craft*'), *David and Uriah* (by the same), *Spirit of Fanaticism*,—do, *Samson's Exploits*,—do, *Battles of Joshua*,—do." See Samuel B. H. Judah, *The Mystical Craft, The Most Crafty of All Crafts, and the Most Delusive of All Delusions, as exemplified by our modern mercuries, or missionaries, and others engaged in the great measures for proselyting the world, and for hastening the Glorious Millennium of ecclesiastical supremacy in this our favoured land of liberty* (New York: G. Vale at the Beacon Office, 1844), available at the Library Company of Philadelphia. Judah's name is also penciled into the 1835 edition of *David and Uriah* housed at the American Jewish Historical Society, though there is no way to date the emendation. For more on the dispute, see Michael P. Kramer, "Critical Narcissism and the Coming-of-Age of Jewish American Literary Studies," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94, no. 4 (Autumn 2004): 677–93.

7. The play was based on Eugène Scribe's *La Juive* (1835). Moncrieff's version remained popular in the United States for several decades and toured the country well into the post–Civil War period.

8. Note that neither Tyler's play nor Judah's two later dramas ever received recorded professional productions.

9. For more on this history, see Kagan and Morgan, *Atlantic Diasporas*.

10. Ben Hassan and Nathan/Carl are discussed in previous chapters. The term *renegado* could also refer to a Christian who had converted to Islam, as in Phillip Massinger's play *The Renegado* (1623).

11. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Duenna: A Comic Opera* (London: T. N. Longman, 1794), 18–19, [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res\\_ver=0.2&res\\_id=xri:ilcs-us&rft\\_id=xri:ilcs:ft:drama:Z000119412:0](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:ilcs-us&rft_id=xri:ilcs:ft:drama:Z000119412:0)

12. For more on this topic see Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation*, 83. Ragussis notes that by the nineteenth century some critics questioned whether Mendoza was offensive to Jewish performers, not just Jewish audience members.

13. Schappes, *A Documentary History of the Jews*, 22.

14. Schappes, *A Documentary History of the Jews*, 29. Alternate arrangements were sometimes made for Jews having to swear official oaths. In the 1790s, for example, David Franks swore an affidavit on the "five books of Moses" in lieu of a Christian Bible.

15. The history of Philadelphia politician Israel Israel that I discuss earlier in this work suggests the opposite case: Israel's family had converted to Christianity and Israel himself was raised as a Christian, yet he was still labeled a "Jew" because of his ancestry.

16. Listings for the play appear in various daybooks, newspapers, and histories of these cities' theatres. Wignell had played Mendoza in Jamaica before coming to the United States, and Godwin had also appeared in the same production (though in a different role, obviously). See Richardson Wright, *Revels in Jamaica, 1682–1838: Plays and Players of a Century, Tumblers and Conjurors, Musical Refugees and Solitary Showmen, Dinners, Balls and Cockfights, Darksy Mimmers and Other Memories of High Times and Merry Hearts* (1937; repr., New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969), 99. Occupying British forces had also tried to stage a selection of songs from it in New York in 1782. See Brown, *The Theatre in America*, 137. I have not yet

been able to locate any reviews that point specifically to a particular actor's interpretation of Mendoza during this time period, but artist John Zoffany sketched British actor Mr. Quick in the role sometime between 1775 and 1777. <http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/detail/FOLGERCM1~6~6~358046~130219:-Mr—Quick-as-Isaac-Mendoza-in-Sher>

17. Given the substantial population of Portuguese- and Spanish-descended citizens in Jamaica—who, as Errol Hill notes, were “most active in promoting professional and amateur productions”—such plays must have presented unique opportunities for double-coding with Kingston audiences. Hill states that “Plays about Jews were . . . of particular interest to this sector of the audience [Jewish citizens].” See Errol Hill, *The Jamaican Stage, 1655–1900: Profile of a Colonial Theatre* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 80. Hill's study records some British plays about Jewish characters that do not seem to have made it to American shores, including Cumberland's farce *The Jew Outwitted*.

18. As noted in earlier chapters, Wignell was particularly known for his rustic or simple characters. He was also (reportedly) George Washington's favorite performer.

19. Rowson, *Slaves in Algiers*, 17.

20. Rowson, *Slaves in Algiers*, 37.

21. The theme of *pro bono publico*—service for the public good—proved popular among post-Revolutionary political leaders and businessmen. It could be used as a (cynical) rationale for money-making schemes, but it *was* more often invoked to convey the virtuous citizen's duty to the state.

22. Sarna, *American Judaism*, 36.

23. “Appeal to the Citizens of Philadelphia for Donations to Save their Synagogue from Foreclosure from Mikve Israel Congregation,” April 30, 1788, facsimile, Society Miscellaneous Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The petition, directed toward other residents of the city, called for financial assistance in the amount of 800£ to save their synagogue.

24. *Pennsylvania Mercury*, July 15, 1788.

25. Despite the religious tolerance professed in the nation's foundational documents, individual state laws still militated against Jewish Americans' full political participation.

26. Sarna, *American Judaism*, 38.

27. Sarna, *American Judaism*, 38.

28. Blessings may be and often are said over bread, wine, and other kinds of food before a meal. The *birkat hamazon* is a prayer of thanks recited after eating. For more, see Kerry M. Olitzky, *An Encyclopedia of American Synagogue Ritual* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 15–16.

29. Olitzky also notes that Sephardic Jews (which would have been the dominant community in Philadelphia during this period) used an altered version of the *zimmun*, or ritual invitation to dine and commune, so Philadelphia audiences might have been privy to this as well. See Olitzky, *An Encyclopedia*, 16–17.

30. Diary of Mrs. Smith, February 3, 1793–July 12, 1793, undated entry, 14, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

31. She noted that she and her husband also shared the ship with eighteen members of Thomas Wade West's acting company, who also disembarked in Norfolk. Diary of Mrs. Smith, February 3, 1793–July 12, 1793, undated entry, 14–40, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

32. Diary of Mrs. Smith, February 3, 1793–July 12, 1793, undated entry, 14–40, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.



33. George Washington to the congregation at Newport, Rhode Island, August 21, 1790, American Jewish Historical Society. For the text of Gershom Seixas's letter to Washington on behalf of the congregation and Washington's reply, see: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trm006.html>

34. Sarna, *American Judaism*, 37.

35. Herbert Tobias Ezekiel and Gaston Lichtenstein, *The History of the Jews of Richmond from 1769 to 1917* (Richmond: Herbert Ezekiel, 1917), 26.

36. Note that Myron Berman describes it as a "skit" in his work on Richmond's Jewish population. See Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 82.

37. Darmstadt was apparently noted for his atrocious spelling and reportedly commented on it to his correspondents. It hardly seems surprising, however, given that he was not a native-born English speaker and only came to the colonies as an adult. See Joseph Darmstadt, "Purim Poem, March 13, 1789," file number 1789-III-12, American Jewish Archives. Many thanks to Archivist Elaine Ho, who forwarded me a scan of this item. A short excerpt from the poem is also quoted in Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 82. For more on Darmstadt, see Gaston Lichtenstein, "The History of the Jews of Richmond," *The Reform Advocate*, March 8, 1913.

38. Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, *The History of the Jews*, 36.

39. Berman suggests that Darmstadt quarreled with his local lodge but that he remained loyal to the Masonic community and that they also continued to support him.

40. The city's Jewish population grew throughout the early nineteenth century. Richmond's Ashkenazic community eventually founded their own synagogue, Beth Ahabah. See Gregg D. Kimball, *American City, Southern Place: A Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 52–54.

41. There were two men named Samuel Mordecai in Richmond; one was Rachel Mordecai's uncle and the other was her brother. The elder Samuel was an investor in the Richmond playhouse. The younger Mordecai is the one whose letters concerning the fire I cite below.

42. Samuel Mordecai to Rachel Mordecai, December 27, 1811, Mordecai Family Papers, series 1.2, folder 5, Southern Historical Collection, the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

43. Isaac Markens, *The Hebrews in America: A Series of Historical and Biographical Sketches* (1888, repr., London: Forgotten Books, 2013), 86–87, [http://www.forgottenbooks.com/books/The\\_Hebrews\\_in\\_America\\_1000218271](http://www.forgottenbooks.com/books/The_Hebrews_in_America_1000218271). For additional names, see Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, *The History of the Jews*, 132.

44. Solomon Mordecai to Samuel Mordecai, Mordecai Family Papers, series 1.2, folder 6, subseries 1:2, Southern Historical Collection, the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

45. Rachel Mordecai wrote from Warrenton, North Carolina, that she too was fasting on January 1 (the date named to commemorate those killed in the tragedy). See Rachel Mordecai to Samuel Mordecai, January 5, 1812, Mordecai Family Papers, series 1.2, folder 6, subseries 1:2, Southern Historical Collection, the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It should also be noted that a number of African Americans perished in the fire. They had been among the audience members in the upper galleries.

46. Savannah, Charleston, Philadelphia, Newport, and New York were among the early American communities with Jewish cemeteries.

47. George D. Fisher, *History and Reminiscences of the Monumental Church, Richmond, VA., from 1814 to 1878* (Richmond, VA: Whittet & Shepperson, 1880), 19.



48. Quoted in “Victims List—Known Victims,” *The Richmond Theatre Fire of 1811*, Meredith Henne Baker, <http://www.theaterfirebook.com/links-resources/victims-survivors-list/>, accessed July 21, 2015. This useful website is a companion to Baker’s award-winning book *The Richmond Theatre Fire* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012).

49. Noted in *The Reporter* (Lexington, KY), January 14, 1811. The article documents an ordinance passed by the city on December 27, 1811.

50. Quoted in Fisher, *History and Reminiscences*, 13. Accounts of the funeral also appeared in various contemporary newspapers such as the *Norfolk Gazette and Public Ledger* (January 3, 1812) and Baltimore’s *Federal Republican* (January 9, 1812).

51. *Weekly Eastern Argus* (Portland, ME), January 16, 1812. Little information remains about how African American survivors commemorated the deaths of loved ones lost in the fire.

52. Jewish resident Joseph Marx, who had family members perish in the blaze, was a member of the committee. See “Victims List—Known Victims,” and Fisher, *History and Reminiscences*, 19.

53. Fisher, *History and Reminiscences*, 24.

54. The names of many of the fire’s victims are inscribed on a plaque outside the church; that list includes at least two Jewish families (Marx and Zipporah). Members of other churches, including the Richmond Catholic church, also contributed funds to the project.

55. Samuel Mordecai to Rachel and Ellen Mordecai, October 3, 1810, box 1, Jacob Mordecai Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

56. Jacob Mordecai to Samuel Mordecai, November 29, 1810, folder 3, subseries 1.1, Mordecai Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Jacob Mordecai’s letter points specifically to the Methodists and Baptists as the source of the rumors about his conversion. These two sects were particularly active during the Second Great Awakening.

57. Mordecai’s comments reference Jacques’s well-known speech on the “Seven Ages of Man” from Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*.

58. Samuel Mordecai to Ellen Mordecai, October 16, 1810, Box 1, Jacob Mordecai Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC. Even in their efforts to acquire a greater cosmopolitan polish, family members found themselves confronted with persistent stereotypes. Almost fifty years later, Isabel Mordecai would record a troubling anecdote in her journal. She had traveled to London, where she had the pleasure of attending the theatre and concerts on a regular basis. She also traveled to Brussels where, on July 23, 1858, she heard a story about miraculous communion wafers “said to have been stolen by Jews.” When the Jews put their knives in them, spurted blood, the Jews were “struck senseless” and then “denounced by a pretended spectator who had been converted to Christianity” and tortured before being burnt at the stake. See the Isabel Mordecai Journals, 1858–61, box 4, Jacob Mordecai Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

59. Ironically, Ellen and Rachel Mordecai would later embrace Christianity, much to the consternation of their family. Rachel Mordecai’s letters in particular record her pain at the suffering she caused her family. For more on Mordecai’s conversion, see Bingham, *Mordecai*, 170–76.

60. Daniel Cooledge, *The Dying Jewess* (New York: Daniel Cooledge, [1833?]), <http://www.teachushistory.org/second-great-awakening-age-reform/resources/dying-jewess>

61. For more on the history of this work, see Marius B. Peladeau, "Royall Tyler's Other Plays," *New England Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (March 1967): 48–60. Tyler wrote two other plays with biblical themes, including *The Judgment of Solomon* and *Joseph and his Brethren*. For more on Tyler's treatment of Jewish characters, see Carson and Carson, "The Jews, Royall Tyler, and America's Divided Mind," 79–84.

62. An advertisement for the painting appears in the *New York Evening Post*, July 9, 1822. I have not been able to locate this particular painting, but contemporary engravings feature figures in flowing draperies and turbans, as does the frontispiece of *Esther, the Royal Jewess*, from 1835.

63. See Polack, *Esther, The Royal Jewess*.

64. Tyler, *The Origin of the Feast of Purim*.

65. In his reference to "tabernacles" Tyler may be confusing Purim, which takes place in the spring, with Sukkot, which takes place in the fall and is also known as "The Feast of Tabernacles."

66. Royall Tyler, "Back matter," in Tyler, *The Origin of the Feast of Purim*.

67. Tyler, *The Origin of the Feast of Purim*.

68. It also seems noteworthy that Haggai the Prophet is a figure in Masonic tradition that Tyler might well have been familiar with, given his Masonic affiliations.

69. In *The Algerine Captive* (1797), Tyler resurrects the specter that haunted Jewish Americans: that of the infamous "blood libel." While he dismisses it as a "horrid tale, which should have been despised for its absurdity and inhumanity," it suggests the persistence of this myth in the modern imagination. Carson and Carson, "The Jews, Royall Tyler, and America's Divided Mind," 82.

70. Tyler's drama *Joseph and his Brethren* invokes a similar arc for the characters and also includes a chorus of Jewish women who predict the coming of the Messiah. Tyler uses the chorus to comment on his own theatricality in leaping over the thirteen years between the time Joseph's brothers threw him into a pit and the time when he was revealed as a king in Egypt (after being sold into slavery): "No uninspir'd pen could write / No human wisdom could indite / Compar'd with which the feeble verse / That our poor actors do rehearse / On this our mean Scholastic Stage / Seems dross beside the finest gold." See Royall Tyler, *Joseph and his Brethren: A Sacred Drama*, in *Four Plays by Royall Tyler*, ed. Arthur Wallace Peach and George Floyd Newbrough (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 78, [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res\\_ver=0.2&res\\_id=xri:ilcs-us&rft\\_id=xri:ilcs:ft:amdram:Z000778436:0](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:ilcs-us&rft_id=xri:ilcs:ft:amdram:Z000778436:0)

71. Ware, preface to *The Feast of Tabernacles*, vii–x.

72. Essays on the 1837 production of *The Feast of Tabernacles* appeared in the *Christian Register and Boston Observer* (April 1, 1837) and the *Christian Examiner and General Review* (September 23, 1837). Additionally, an extensive explanation of the holiday, its rituals, and their meanings appeared on December 7, 1843, in the *Boston Recorder* (reprinted from a London paper).

73. See the *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, 1730 and *Ceremonies et Coutumes Religieuses de Tous Les Peuples du Monde*, 1723 (printed in London, 1733).

74. The transitions in the image of Shylock offer a useful yardstick against which to measure these shifts. Macklin had introduced a simpler, more sober costume for Shylock based on those of contemporary Jews in Britain. By the time James William Wallack, Edwin Forrest, and Edwin Booth played Shylock in the mid-nineteenth century, more exotic elements (such as embroidered sashes and long, almost medieval robes) had become standard elements of the costume.

75. *Baltimore Clipper* reprinted in the *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, January 10, 1846.

76. *Baltimore Clipper* reprinted in the *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, January 10, 1846.

77. Wade, *The Jew of Arragon*. Preface.

78. Moncrieff, *The Jewess*.

79. Moncrieff, *The Jewess*, 20–21.

80. Moncrieff, *The Jewess*, 20–21.

81. For more on Isaac Harby, see Zola, *Isaac Harby*. Also see Isaac Harby, *A Selection from the Miscellaneous Writings of the Late Isaac Harby*, 267.

82. Isaac Harby, “Defense of the Drama,” in clippings file titled “Selection from the Various Writings of the late Isaac Harby, Esq., Charleston, 1829,” American Jewish Archives.

83. Isaac Harby, *Alberti* (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1819), 6.

84. Harby, *Alberti*, 6. Like many plays by early Jewish American authors, *Alberti* involves no openly Jewish characters. The action takes place in Florence in 1480 AD. As play opens, the young lover, Ippolito, is telling Lorenzo de Medici (whose life he saved) that he wants to marry the beautiful Antonia. Though Lorenzo favors the union, Ippolito’s father, Alberti, objects to the match, with good reason, since further revelations disclose that Ippolito and Antonia are actually brother and sister! By the end of the drama, however, a priest name Filipo confesses to a deception at the children’s birth that makes them only cousins and thus able to marry.

85. Zola, *Isaac Harby*, 190.

86. For examples of essays on Frey see *Charleston Mercury*, March 19, 26, and August 23, 1823; and *Southern Patriot*, January 9 and April 8, 1824.

87. Zola, *Isaac Harby*, 203–4. Zola also notes that most of the reform society members were only moderately well-off, while many members of the *Adjunta* were quite wealthy, so class issues may have been at play as well.

88. Zola, *Isaac Harby*, 217.

89. Zola, *Isaac Harby*, 217.

90. Zola, *Isaac Harby*, 219–20.

91. For more on the collapse of the group, see Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 631–37; Zola, *Isaac Harby*, 248–49.

92. S. B. H. Judah, *Gotham and the Gothamites: A Medley* (New York: S. King, 1823), 96.

93. S. B. H. Judah, *David and Uriah; A Drama in Five Acts—Founded on the Exploits of the Man After God’s Own Heart* (Philadelphia: Published by the author, 1835). For more on Judah’s work see Harap, *The Image of the Jew*, 581; and Steve Feffer, “Judas the Maccabeas’: Samuel B. H. Judah and the Staging of Jewish Identity in Early American Melodrama,” *Proof-texts* 27, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 474–99.

94. Judah, *David and Uriah*, preface.

95. Judah, *David and Uriah*, preface.

96. Judah, *David and Uriah*, 32.

97. Judah, *The Maid of Midian* (Philadelphia: A. E. Armstrong, 1833), inside title page.

98. Judah, *The Maid of Midian*, preface.

99. Judah, *The Maid of Midian*, 5.

100. Judah, *The Maid of Midian*, 9.

101. Judah, *The Maid of Midian*, 31. Judah published other, equally sarcastic works, as I detail in a note earlier in the chapter.

102. For more on the history of Haskalah in the United States, see Arthur Kiron, “Variet-

ies of Haskalah: Sabato Morais's Program of Sephardi Rabbinic Humanism in Victorian America," in *Renewing the Past: Reconfiguring Jewish Culture From al-Andalus to the Haskalah*, ed. Ross Brann and Adam Sutcliffe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 121–48.

103. Moos, *Mortara*, 93.

104. Moos, *Mortara*, 93.

### *Epilogue*

1. Jonathan D. Sarna, *When General Grant Expelled the Jews* (New York: Schocken Books, 2012). The order was repealed in January of 1864.

2. Moos, *Mortara*, 80.

3. Thomas Dixon, "What the American Stage Owes the Jew," *American Hebrew* CVIII, no. 25 (May 6, 1921).

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